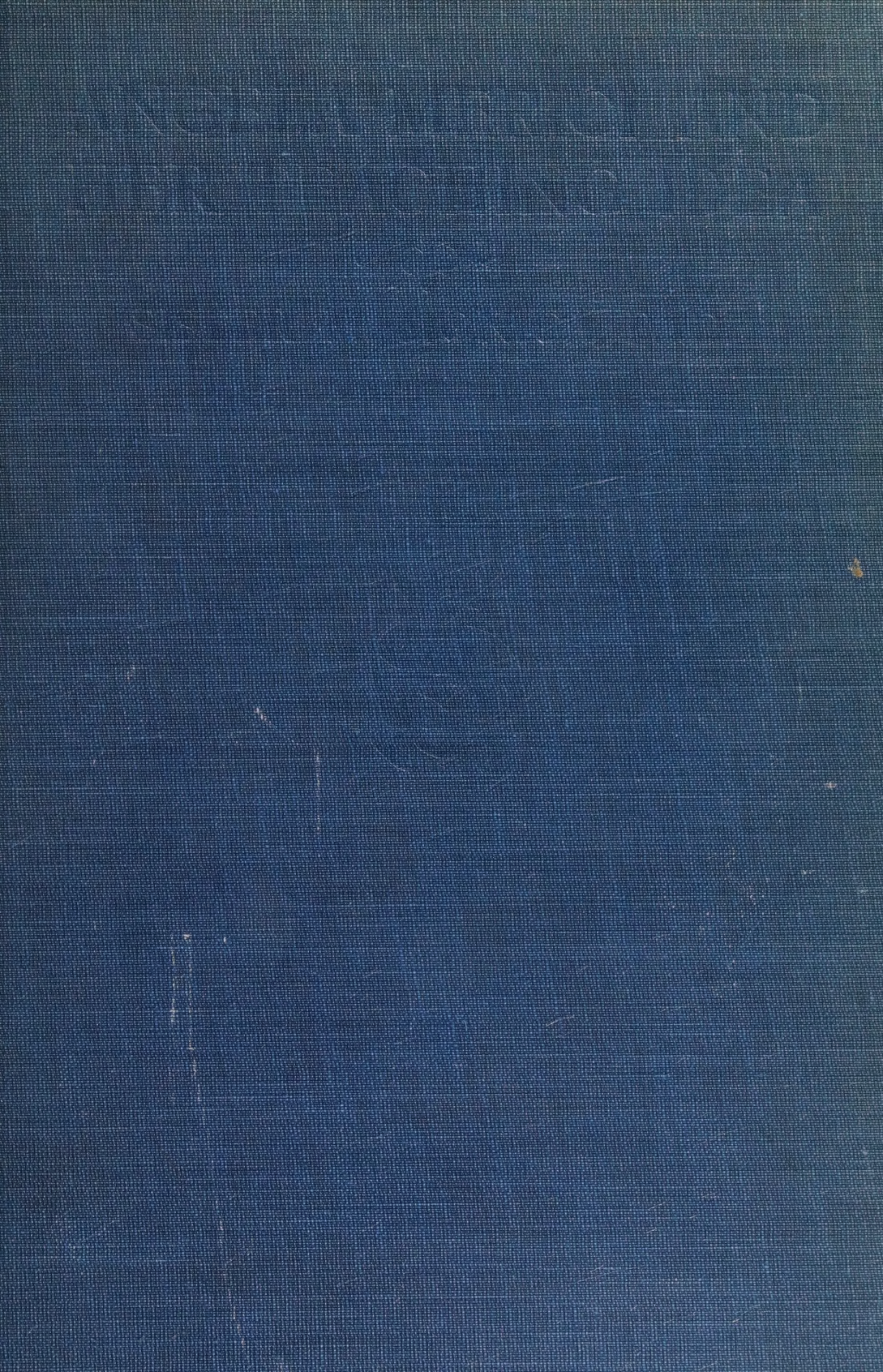














ANGELA MERICI AND  
HER TEACHING IDEA

1474-1540

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RELIEF FROM THE DEATH MASK OF ANGELA MERICI

*Executed under the direction of Clement Barnhorn, in the Study Hall of the  
Brown County Ursulines.*

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*Angela Merici*

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AND HER TEACHING IDEA

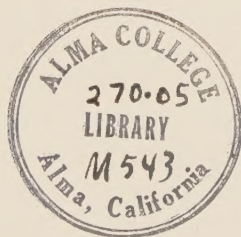
[1474-1540]

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## INTRODUCTION

FROM the earliest period of its history, the Church founded by Christ and commissioned to teach all nations has been a teaching and a learning society. The whole plenitude of religious authority and teaching was vested in the Apostolic College. Wherever converts were gained, provision was made for their instruction in the doctrine of Christ and the observance of the Christian life. Catechumenal schools were established. They were often limited in scope and crude in method, but they were important agencies in the formation of Christian society and Christian civilization. Next came the Catechetical schools with more advanced studies and a curriculum that was steadily extended until it included courses in literature, history, philosophy, theology, mathematics and other sciences. The educational movements of Christianity advanced from age to age, with the conquests of the Church over paganism and barbarism. Episcopal, Cathedral, parish and cloistral schools arose wherever Christian centers were organized, and finally reached their culmination in the universities, the great educational achievement of the Middle Ages (700–1500). From these schools the sacred heritage of Christian education has come down to us.

To educate means to train a human being to live unto God and to reach his final destiny by walking in the way of God's commandments. It means to develop the whole personality according to the nature and dignity of a being created in the image and likeness of his Creator. The ideal and end of Christian education is to form Christ in the heart of man, and to do this the teacher must first be formed after the Divine Model, for the teacher is the school. True education is the symmetrical development of body and soul, mind, heart, and will, and their right guidance in the way of truth and duty, with the view of leading man to the completeness of life. To educate man as man is to draw forth, cultivate, strengthen, train and direct all the powers and faculties with which God has endowed him. The

process takes into account the present and the future, the temporal and the eternal, and no process of human development that fails to include the whole being and existence of man can claim to be philosophical, complete, or desirable.

Man's life and nature are physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual. The body must be nourished, exercised and strengthened. The powers of intellect must be evoked, cultivated and disciplined. The passions must be restrained and purified, and the whole moral nature must be trained to conform to the dictates of conscience and respect the eternal distinction between right and wrong. Most important of all, the spiritual sense is to be developed, refined, and perfected; for complete living is to live unto God and eternal life. "Now this is eternal life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." John XVII, 3.

To shut out definite dogmatic instruction and practices of piety from the school is to shut out the light of heaven from the soul. Fancy systems of non-sectarian ethical culture, or vague moral teaching will not sustain frail human nature in the storms of temptation, hold men and women secure in honesty, purity and truth; or save homes and nations from moral corruption and degradation. Knowledge is one thing, Christian virtue is another. Unreligious instruction of the intellect may produce a mathematician or a chemist, it cannot form a Christian. "Quarry the granite rock with razors or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may we hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passions and the pride of man." Hence all science and all duties of personal, domestic, social and political morality depend upon religion and religion is inculcated and fostered by education. Religious education is the ground and pillar of the kingdom of God on earth, it is also the foundation and stability of the home and the state. A nation that will not recognize and worship God in its schools undermines its own vitality and endurance.

In the life and achievements of Angela Merici (1474-1540) we have an example of the wonderful manner in which God chooses and forms human instruments that are destined to serve some great purpose and aid the Church to exert its saving influence in society.



She was destined to found a teaching community and a mode of female education which have survived nearly four hundred years of time and are still in operation in many lands. Catholics venerate her as one whose holiness entitles her to a place among the saints, and whose knowledge of the problems of the schools has given her a place in history among real educators. Having the far vision and wisdom of a saint, she saw beyond the horizon of her own time, and planned so wisely, that her sound principles of education and pedagogical methods for the training of teachers and pupils have stood the tests of modern experiments and progress in the schools. She realized that the most important factor in education is the teachers, and she began her schools by training teachers whose human knowledge would be illumined by the light of the Holy Ghost directing them in the evolution of the faculties and the formation of the Christian character in their pupils, for neither women nor men can reach their proper place in the life of the world and fulfil their mission to humanity in its widest and loftiest sense, unless they are formed for that mission by the Christian example as well as by the instruction of their teachers.

It was her holy ambition to establish a system of education and to form a body of teachers according to the mind that is in Christ Jesus, for He is the way, the truth, and the life. "The grace of God our Savior has appeared to all men; instructing us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly and justly in this world, looking for the blessed hope and coming of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." Titus II, 12.

She had in mind the soul and its eternal destiny. To her God was the great Reality. The knowledge and worship of God were the truth and law that must dominate life and be the measure of all movements of the intellect, of the heart, and of the will.

Angela determined that since education is a means to the elevation of human personality, women, who are the equal of men in personal worth and eternal destiny, should have opportunities of intellectual culture and studies as serious and as thorough as were open to men; but they were not encouraged to attempt to forsake their own sphere that they might be less womanly and more masculine in mind and manners.

In her mind equality with men did not mean co-education or that

girls were to be denaturalized and made unfeminine and mannish. True education elevates and ennobles, it does not debase and degrade. There are distinctions and purposes of nature that are unchangeable. There are two forces and two distinct spheres of influence and of action that have been divinely ordained as necessary to human life and human society. The natural capacities and qualities that differentiate women from men, require some difference of educational methods and principles in the school as well as in the home, that the best qualities of woman may be brought forth and strengthened, and that there may be that intuitive clearness of intellect, gentleness of manner, modesty with firmness of will, that become woman and fit her to fulfil her part in the world.

While the education of girls in Christian schools differs from the education of boys, the difference consists chiefly in giving to girls the training and culture that is best fitted to bring out in them the innate qualities and implant the womanly virtues that enable them to be a leaven in the mass and live a complete Christian life.

Our boasted twentieth-century higher education for women is like much of our self self-complacency and flattery in other matters. In proportion to the population, there were probably as many women students in the higher schools of France and other European countries in the days of St. Angela as there are today. It is doubtful whether in four or five hundred years from now there will be as many women of our time famed for great learning as have come down to us from the Catholic schools which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries exerted a marked influence on art and letters and perpetuated the learning and religious traditions of the Middle Ages.

Teachers, as well as pupils, in many of our high schools, colleges, and even in some universities, believe that the women of four hundred years ago were left in ignorance, and that there was a long period of darkness through the Middle Ages down to the Reformation, a time devoid of scholarship and intellectual culture for men and women, but for women more than for men. If this were true, the Church could be held responsible; for education in the Middle Ages was controlled by the Church from the elementary schools to the universities.

The course of studies in the schools of that period did not include

the great variety of studies that are to be found on the programs of modern colleges and universities, but there is no doubt that the essential studies were taught and taught so thoroughly that even an unbeliever like Huxley admitted, "I doubt if the curriculum of any modern university shows so clear and generous a comprehension of what is meant by culture, as this old Trivium and Quadrivium does."

*Trivium* and *Quadrivium* included the seven liberal arts of the mediaeval schools; Trivium, the language subjects: grammar, logic, rhetoric; Quadrivium, scientific subjects: music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy. It was a curriculum that included literature, science and art.

When St. Angela established her teaching order and their schools under the patronage of St. Ursula (1534) public education was beset with grave dangers to Christian faith and morality on account of the spirit of the Renaissance or Humanism that had prevailed for more than a hundred years.

Renaissance, or Humanism as it was called, was a movement to give pagan ideals, pagan literature, and pagan art a foremost place in the higher schools. It was a departure from the intellectual life and methods of the Middle Ages and of the school-men. The Renaissance originated in Italy in the fourteenth century, extended into Germany, France and other European countries; attained its highest development in the sixteenth and gradually declined in the seventeenth century. A new principle was introduced into the schools and into the world of students and scholars. The thoughts, the style, the sentiments of the classic Greek and Latin authors were to be the standards of learning and the guides of the young mind, in poetry, oratory, history, philosophy.

In the mediaeval schools the heritage and treasures of ancient classic literature had been preserved and given a place of honor, but they had not exercised the dominant influence. Humanism did not find treasures of learning that had been lost nor did it introduce much that was new into the methods or matter of study, but it assumed a proud and offensive attitude towards Christian education and introduced a spirit of secularism and worship of pagan antiquity which were at variance with the principles and ideals that had ruled in education during the best period of the preceding Christian ages. The



result was, that with the impulse given to the study of classic literature and art of antiquity, there was also a casting aside of Christian traditions, contempt for the early Christian and mediaeval writers and for Holy Scripture. Humanism meant shipwreck of faith for many, and with paganism of mind came a paganism of morals that contributed largely to the decline of Christian civilization and to the religious and political revolutions of the sixteenth century.

The position of girls in the schools of Italy and France in the early days of the Ursuline Schools was not unlike the position of Catholic pupils in many of the non-sectarian schools of the twentieth century. It was an age of aggressive skepticism, bold infidelity, shameless immodesty, and pagan immorality. Youth in the days of Humanism as in our own materialistic age, needed the steadying and directing force of sound doctrine and the restraining and fortifying power of Sacraments and prayer, that they might stand in faith and purity amid the insidious attacks and seductive allurements of a sensual world and a creedless majority that liked not to have God in their knowledge.

The Ursuline ideal of education was in the seventeenth century the same as it is in 1926, to train teachers and conduct schools that neglect no useful branch of human knowledge while they surround pupils with all the safeguards and helps of religion, that Christ's truth and grace may be ingrained as the form and guiding principles of life. Sacramental graces, Scripture lessons of faith and piety, pictures and histories of holy persons and chaste scenes, sacred statues, prayers, liturgical ceremonies, singing of hymns, all are to be mingled with every element of education, that the heart may be formed as well as the mind, and that the will may be fortified as well as the intellect, so that the soul may be filled with the light and liberty of Christian truth, purity, peace and joy.

Ursuline schools for nearly four hundred years have trained, and are still training learned and saintly women leaders in intellectual and spiritual movements for all the better things of life; the extension of the kingdom of heaven, the promotion of justice and charity among men, ardent loyalty to Christ and all His interests, for these are the things which the world most needs and least values. Without

knowledge of their motives, labors, and achievements, the history of Christian civilization is not understood.

"After all," says Dr. James J. Walsh, "this is only what is to be anticipated from what is symbolized and prefigured in the story of the foundation of the Church. When the Son of God came as the Redeemer of mankind, beside Him in His life and mission, the highest of mortals in the influence which she was to have over all succeeding generations stood the woman, whose seed was to crush the serpent's head, the Mother of the infant Church and the Mother of all Christians ever since. Surely this was given for a sign not to be contradicted in the aftertimes. As the Mother beside the Son, so was woman ever to stand a most precious influence in the work of Christianity. As the great scheme of redemption was dependent on her consent, so ever was woman to be a great auxiliary of God in the accomplishment of good for humanity."

+ Regis Canevin





## FOREWORD

GABRIEL COZZANO, Angela's private secretary, said of her that "her burning spirit pierced the spheres and stood unabashed before her God"; and this saying seems best to express her.

These pages contain the history of her mind and its content. The reactions upon her Teaching-Idea from the age of the Italian Renaissance in which she lived, and the subsequent fortunes and trend of that Idea in its bearings upon European society down to the French Revolution, have proved well worthy of research and study.

She was a mystic and a seer who declared it had been revealed to her that she was destined to do this work and she predicted that her institute for teaching girls would last to the end of the world; it is still flourishing vigorously, after four hundred years.

Once I dreamed of gathering out of the Italian and French sources, in which it was locked up, the lore that existed concerning Angela Merici and of setting it into some sort of approachable shape in English for her busy American daughters. Hardly had I set hand to the task when, one day, it was my good fortune to listen to an ardent appeal from lips that now are cold, an appeal that fell like a spark upon my faltering purpose; and if today he were alive, this imprint would bear a dedication to the speaker of that morning, as it here embodies a sincere tribute to the memory of the late Dr. Peter C. Yorke, priest, of San Francisco. The following lines contain his appeal:

"I would put one more thought before you, Brothers and Sisters teaching in our schools. Teaching is both a science and an art. It is good for you to know the scientific basis and the scientific justification of the methods which you employ, but after all, for you and for the children it is the art that counts. Now art is a very peculiar thing. It blows, like the spirit, where it listeth. We cannot conjure it from the Heavens by spells and charms. But from time to time men

and women rise up who possess the art in a high form, and though they do not disdain the help of science and study and practice, this art is in them as a native power which informs all they do. As in the arts of sculpture and painting and architecture we have had Michael Angelo and Raphael and Murillo, so we have had great masters in the art of teaching. And as in the Fine Arts the masters founded a school in which their disciples followed their methods, so in the Catholic Church the great teachers created schools of teaching. They are the founders of the Religious Teaching Orders and you are their children.

“ Their methods were different as the methods of the painters were different, but they are the best methods for their own peculiar schools. To you I would say, if you would succeed, enter into the spirit of your holy founders, study their lives and their ways, understand their aims, and with proper allowance for time and circumstance, conform yourselves to their methods. In that way, you will develop in the fullest and most natural manner your own powers and those of the institute to which you belong, and you will give of your best to the children whom God has committed to your care.”

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ANGELA MERICI AND  
HER TEACHING IDEA

1474-1540





# *Angela Merici*

## *AND HER TEACHING IDEA*

### CHAPTER ONE

#### ALONG LAKE GARDA

ALL sorts of gracious and tender fancies prevailed among the children of the Lombard valleys. Time out of mind they would sit on the doorstep when twilight closed in upon the bright Italian skies, and pointing a knowing finger up at the stars they would tell each other for the thousandth time,

*“In Paradise, everybody eats bread made out of gold.”*

It was like the Scandinavians, who expected to drink there a mixture of milk and gold, — last echo, perhaps, of the Golden Age. Brescian children believed in a goblin, too, named Orco, who played tricks on the housewives by changing himself into a snowball or a swarm of bees.<sup>1</sup> They loved the time-honored legend that on the night of Our Lord's Birth the beasts in the stalls spoke prophecies: the mysterious spirits of the silent woods brought to the lowly creatures this faculty, so thought the Merici children. But although gifts did mark the hallowed season, there was no Santa Claus; instead, the night before Santa Lucia, December thirteenth, the Merici little ones hung a shoe outside the window to hold all the toys and sweetmeats that come to every good boy and girl.

They lived close to the heart of life, these Brescian children among whom Angela was brought up. Dearly did they love all the simple

<sup>1</sup> Gabriele Rosa: *Dialetti costumi e tradizioni nelle provincie di Bergamo e di Brescia*, 3rd, ed. Brescia, 1870. The proverbs, folk dances and games, customs and traditions of the Brescian people which the scholar Rosa has in this book are delightful material, throwing valuable light on a virile race.

creatures of earth. First there was the snail: he, they declared, would show his horns, if you would sing,

*"O little snail so shy,  
Shall the wind be cold and dry?  
Or moist and warm shall it be?  
Snail, show thy horns to me!"*

At Bergamo, they used to chase the big black beetles away from young sprouts and buds with the rhyme,

*"O big-mouthed Beetle,  
Calls your lady sweet;  
Your sweet lady wants you,  
March! get on your feet!"*

*"O Balores che gula  
El te ciama la tò morusa,  
La tò morusa l'at völ piö be:  
Marcia, marcia, föri di pe."*

It was a folk-lore to enrich the average child with a vivid fancy ranging from poetry to rollicking humor, which, in itself, makes always for lively companionship; with an imagination ready for the unexpected, that might, if coupled with initiative, produce a decided originality, even genius; and above all, enriching with a glad sanity bred of kinship with fish, flesh, and fowl.

Such was the endowment which her native folk-lore gave Angela Merici to begin with, auspicious soil for any special idea, great or small.

Two miles out of Desenzano, approached by a winding lane between hedgerows, rambling and time-stained, stands the house of the Mericis. It is now nearly four hundred years old. One would pass it by unnoticed. When Angela was a child, the little place must have looked fresh and substantial in the midst of goodly acreage. At that period John Merici owned his own home and a comfortable estate of no mean value. Fact and tradition combine to show that the Mericis, father to son, had probably always been landholders of

fluctuating fortune but steady respectability; — respectability, — a quality which carried Angela through life with a certain ease, as if no one were too high for her and none too low. She was going to need just such a democratic poise and from her father she derived it.

John Merici was registered among the Notables of Desenzano.<sup>2</sup> On the weekly market day, when the Piazza del Mercato was full of sturdy countrymen and buzzing contadini in their brilliant bodices and necklaces trafficking over fruits and wares, John Merici drove his carozza drawn by sleek oxen over the country roads, and was hailed along the portici as such a sterling, kindly, good man ought to be. We think of him pruning his vines, mending his ditches, examining his orchard trees, helping gather in and store the fruit. We see his little girl coming down the hedgerows, a song upon her lips, to bring the laborers food and drink, while beyond is a glimpse of her mother in the doorway.

Angela's mother was a Biancosi from Salò, well-to-do people of property, from whom the child inherited a refinement of judgment and temper. There seems to have been little of pretension about the dutiful wife and mother, living a simple country life, bringing up her children in the fear and love of God. To her mind, as to her age, had arisen no contradiction to the old axiom that nature knows no guardian for the child other than the parent. The Mericis conceived that nature itself had imposed upon them the duty of rearing their own children. Their philosophy, if you had drawn it from them in their own way of thinking, taught that the inalienable right of the child was to look to those who had given it existence for aid and guidance as long as judgment was not yet formed.<sup>3</sup> Dame Merici would have said "Have we not brought her into the world? Is she not the babe of my breast?" John would have looked around the old farm house and exclaimed "Why, she has a right to our protection; what would we be thinking of to give her up?"

It is thought that they had a family of five children,<sup>4</sup> three

<sup>2</sup> Postel: *Histoire de Ste. Angelè Merici et de tout l'Ordre des Ursulines*, Vol. I.

<sup>3</sup> "Nature knows the State in other capacities, as necessary for the defense of the nation, or for supplying means for social progress, but of the State as nurse of the child, Nature knows nothing. Nature has bound parent and child into one distinctive group." Willman: *Lexikon der Padagogik*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix Note, *The Merici Children*.

boys and two girls, the boys all dying quite young, and Angela coming the youngest of the family; and the most reliable authorities place her birth on March 1, 1474, in this old farmhouse, a matter of a stone's throw from Lake Garda. That date then, marked the arrival of a child of normal Brescian pedigree, vigorous and upright from the father, gentle and womanly from the mother, with no Bohemian crimson in her veins, but an imaginative resource that could comprehend everything from creature-life to the daily bread of the angels. She would need it all.

There are two Desenzanos: Desenzano Stazione, grimy and forlorn, the stopping-off place today from Milan and Venice; and Desenzano-on-the-Lake, Angela's home, which you reach by a long drive under chestnut trees, just putting forth of an April morning their first, crimply, tender, green leaves. As your train comes puffing in, you catch a survey of it all. You come out from between two lines of hills, and just at that point the Lago di Garda at the foot of the snow-capped Alps bursts in beauty upon you, sapphire-clear, and dazzling in the morning light. The water in the Blue Grotto at Capri is not more beautiful.

A region such as this might make of a man either a pagan or a saint. "Oh the divine nights on Lake Garda!" chants a son of the soil;<sup>5</sup> "Who can express its spiritual beauty, its mysterious charm? the radiant mists of the stars wandering in the sea of infinite azure; the solemn silence of nature that sleeps beneath, steeping all the world in stillness; the sighing, trembling air, reverberating as with indistinct voices; while from earth to heaven, on the odorous breath of flowers and herbs, arise the aspirations, the memories, the tumults, the ecstasies, of the great human soul, awake and pulsating forever through all space and time."

Since the age of Catullus, the storms of Lake Garda have fretted the fisher wives; it is a restless body of water and keeps its own secrets. And therefore, when they burned the Christmas-crib straw at Lenten-time to make the blest ashes,<sup>6</sup> the girls would mix what

<sup>5</sup> G. Solitro: Lago di Garda, Bergamo, 1904.

<sup>6</sup> One may not pass final judgment, as Gabriele Rosa well says, without looking into the customs of the people and the traditional sayings of a district; for the materials for ethnography and history are as significant as they are obscure. See G. Rosa, *op. cit.*

was left with withered olive leaves and toss them into the air to avert danger from their fathers and brothers out on the lake, while meantime, mother, mindful of her man in the boat, would sighing take up the time-worn household tasks; for she was thinking that

*“Madre che fila poco  
i suoi figli portano  
scoperto il diretano.”*

*“When the mother spins but little,  
The sons go with bare backs.”*

The fisher-folk of Lake Garda had some quaint customs of their own; a happy, hardy people were they, resigned and hopeful:

*“In the fisherman’s calling, — a fortune to win, and  
seven sorrows!”*<sup>7</sup>

declared the old proverb.

You will find the town of Desenzano a little hamlet of irregular houses, where in spite of the general air of slowness, some traffic is done, particularly in grain. You will count a tower or two outlined against the sky, remains of the mediaeval castello; you may stroll up and down under the quaint portici lined with shops along the lake front; or you may cross the Piazza del Mercato and take a look at Angela’s statue in the public square. Lake Garda is the epic background of her life story. Especially during her youth was its spiritual quality part of the fabric of her dreams, while its whims and uncertainties bred in her mind that readiness for any fate which characterizes a fisher-folk: perhaps a divine discontent, the profound basal melancholy, which, as world-weariness, seemed to touch her in later years.

## II

From the first she seems to have been naturally attractive, with an enchanting modesty about her. The most striking trait in her face, even in maturity, was said to have been its tender sweetness.

<sup>7</sup> “Nel mestere del pescatore,  
Una fortuna e sette dolori.”



She was what you would call a good little girl from the dawn of reason, and displayed a judgment old for her years. John Merici and his wife seemed to feel intuitively that there was something unusual about the child.

"What do you think is going to become of our little Angela?" they asked each other from time to time. Realizing a certain responsibility, they watched her with furtive predilection. They knew no more than we just at what period the supernatural life begins to function for merit during infancy; but we know now that it begins to express itself through suggestion from without, and Dame Merici knew it in her own way when she first communicated to her child the notions of God and of the supernatural world.<sup>8</sup> It is certainly true that we have no other way of knowing the supernatural or of talking about it than by studying our own nature, and learning to appreciate the fact that Grace perfects nature. Dame Merici understood this, as every Catholic understands it, that the relations between child-nature and this new life called Grace are actually relations of continuity and not of contradiction or separation. St. Thomas, two centuries before her time had described it for us: nature, the mode in which Grace is received, and the child's supernatural life taking on this form like the water in a pitcher. The acts of Angela's supernatural life just like those of her every-day life, were thus acts of human psychology, and belong to the history of her mind.

And what was the world familiar to her eyes? Outdoors, in every direction, the opulence of teeming life in tree and shrub, field and upland slope, sky and distant water, beauty everywhere. Indoors, the quiet simplicity of a frugal home, in which the greatest excitement was father's homecoming, or the tramp of the great yoke of oxen that looked at a little girl with steady eyes which seemed strangely mournful; or perhaps the stray visit of a passerby, who sat under the pergola in the courtyard and told long stories as he sipped his wine, so that a very little girl, if she felt not quite sure of his friendliness, would seek shelter behind mother's skirts to see what manner of man was this and whether he were as friendly as her father.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Willman, *op. cit.*

In the early morning there were prayers. Sometimes, in the living-room which seemed so big to little eyes, the door was left wide ajar and the air stole in with fragrance, and down beyond the gnarled olive trees on the roadway the sheep were moving, with lambs bleating and frisking. Little Angela knelt beside her sister, with hands carefully folded and head bent, and if she glanced at the doorway she looked down again, but all through the Ave Maria there came the sound of sheep-bells moving farther away. She loved those prayers.

When she lay on her cot during the mid-day siesta, and the air was languorous and still, except perhaps, for the droning of the cicala, her eyes would wander around the room from the window to the heavy wooden crucifix on the dark wall; and as her little eyelids rose and drooped sleepily, it would seem as though the thorns on the Brow looked very big, and were there tears in the Eyes? Her sensitive little soul was half afraid of the awe that began to steal over her, so she turned instead to where the spark in the tiny lamp was flickering before the Madonna<sup>9</sup> in the corner. She felt somehow assured when she looked there. It was more like mother's face.<sup>10</sup>

It was when Angela was three that the blight described in Melga's chronicle fell over the Merici farm. A severe Spring, the cedars and olives on the hill near Garda withered, while in September a plague of locusts followed with the Tramontana wind, eating roots and stripping all the trees. Then when the children were beginning to be used to the serious expression that had settled on their father's normally cheerful countenance, came injunctions from their mother not to go out to play with any neighboring children, and above all, they must keep off the high-road.<sup>11</sup> For in that year, the Plague

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Pastor: *History of the Popes*, Vol. V, 283.

<sup>10</sup> The home life at Desenzano, in its poetry, may be conceived as depicted in some Madonnas done by Venetian Masters; one of Carpaccio's, in the Staedel Institute at Frankfort, has a Babe in 14th century dress, seated, and turning the leaves of an illuminated book, with the infant John, dressed the same way, pointing his finger at the page. These two chubby infants are perhaps sons of the man who ordered the painting, and the Madonna is their mother, with folded hands, looking on, in grave attitude. Carpaccio lived at the same time with Angela. Cf. Molmenti, *History of Venice*, Vol. II, Pt. II, 198.

<sup>11</sup> Odorici: *Storie Bresciane*, Vol. IX, (1400-1550), quoting Melga's inedited *Chronicle*; Melga tells of the simplicity of the peasantry who, seeing the swarms of voracious

came over the Brescian province, the fatal miasma, the Mazzuocco. The disease increased and spread; people streamed out to the hills, the nobility retiring to their castles where they would not see a soul; Melga computes thirty thousand bodies, so many that "there were no magistrates, no priests, no burial!" dead and dying piled on four-wheeled carts; the porters did not have time to bury all the dead, so they left them, and finding the cemeteries closed at evening, they would climb the walls on ladders and throw dead and dying over: "as my Giacomo saw them do,—and he saw them throw over a beautiful girl of about eighteen!" laments the chronicler.

On Sundays all the Merici family went to Desenzano to Mass. Little and big they went, a matter of a mile or two, a great event for Angela; while the bell in the campanile rang out gladly and flung echoes far out over the glistening lake: "Good people, come to Mass," it seemed to say. She must have heard many a Mass there, wondering at the priest in his glittering chasuble, the acolytes with swinging censers. But best of all it was to crouch on the floor and gaze from statue to picture and picture to blazoned window, drinking in the spiritual beauty. For long before the age of museums and galleries, the Italian churches opened to the soul-hungry multitudes rich stores<sup>12</sup> of architecture, painting and sculpture, all that skilled crafts could produce, that the people might learn through them the mysteries of religion, and at leisure.

Then there were fast days in the Merici household. These were serious times, scrupulously observed, and even the little ones shared the spirit of abstemiousness, little Christians! Pastor tells that anyone who would disregard the precept of the Church on this point was unheard of.

"Why must you fast, mother, you, who are so good?" the older sister asked.

"Because of sin," Signora Merici would answer gravely. And

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insects, tried to scare them off the hills with cries. He and his son did relief work in the Plague-stricken districts.

<sup>12</sup> See Pastor, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, 83; an interesting, painstaking, detailed revelation: he has examined everything that may throw light on the Catholic family and society of that day, from documents to diaries and contemporary paintings, prayer books to the staging of the popular drama.

thus they learned through the fibre of early affection how great an evil is sin, and became familiar with the self-denying ordinance of Christ.

In the evening when the day's work was over, and the plans for the morrow discussed with his wife, John Merici would sit down with his family around him and read aloud from Scripture or the *Lives of Saints*. The *Fathers of the Desert* was a favorite book. Then the eager young minds were alert with questions to which their parent was oracle. And as this was their chief intellectual food there was all next day to digest it. The perception of the spiritual life awoke in Angela almost with the natural consciousness; and the Grace of Baptism in the child's soul as yet untarnished, was the atmosphere in which the truths of faith unfolded themselves. The invisible world became to her as real as the visible, as is apt to be the case with any children. She listened thirstily to the stories of martyrs, and anchorites, and apostles. At her age, to hear a thing from her parents' lips was to love it, to love it was to desire to imitate it. This train of thought became more or less habitual to her. But her sister, formed in the same school, was differently gifted, of a different destiny. So it was that while Signora Merici took pains to note the dutifulness of her elder daughter, she could not but mark certain indications in Angela, a quicker aptitude, a more eager taste for the spiritual, a bent of mind more suited to it.

### III

The Brescians as a race were profoundly religious. The principal saints' days were, by law, civic affairs, even provincial affairs, with privileges not to be gainsaid. Shops were closed, processions went marching through the streets, trumpets, pifferari, music everywhere! gala-day for the children. Angela's pulses beat to rackets and sweetmeats, but she was vaguely glad that she had friends in Heaven.

As country children, the Mericis were brought up on a veritable saints' calendar of the farm, for, beginning with December, a chain of proverbs about the crops stretched through the year from saint's day to saint's day, and often would the youngsters, Angela with her brothers, go shouting out the rhythms:

*"If it be fair St. Gall's day,  
Fair will it be Christ's Birthday!"*

*"Tra lo sposo e la sposa,  
Si semina la linosa."*

*"Between spouse and spouse  
Plant the flax!"*

*St. Joseph, Mar. 19;*

*Mary, Mar. 25.*

*"By St. George's day, . . . Apr. 23,  
Flax has grown apace."*

*"On San Bernardino, . . . May 20,  
Flax in flower!"*

*"St. Agnes' day, the lizard creeps out of the hedge."*

*"A Santa Maria Maddalena,  
La noce è piena;  
O piena o da riempirsi,  
I nostri ragazzi la vogliono aprire."*

*"On St. Mary Magdalen's  
The walnut tree full;  
But full or empty,  
Our lads will open them."  
July 22.<sup>13</sup>*

John Merici had his autumn frolic in the hunting season, not overlooked; for

*"St. Matthew's day the snares are set; . . . Sept. 21.  
St. Martin's day, destroy the stakes." . . . Nov. 11.*

Nor was the wine either without its heavenly protectors:

*"Who cuts his vines St. Martin's Day,  
Gains both bread and wine, they say."*

<sup>13</sup> Religious Calendar of the Brescian farmer, in G. Rosa, *op. cit.*



How charming the unspoiled faith which in this pretty calendar links the seen with the unseen world. Their folk-lore evinces a tender love of Our Lady. On her wayside shrines the Merici children would hang the best ears of corn, fruits, bundles of cakes, all sorts of homely offerings. Anxiously did Angela's father look out for the Feast of the Purification, Feb. 2, to compute prospects for his crops, the children shouting:

*"At Our Lady's candlemas,  
Winter's cold we shall pass;  
But if it rain or sharp wind blow,  
Forty days back we'll go!"*

Such a folk-lore ringing constantly in her ears, it was but natural that Angela grew to love and to think about the citizens of Heaven. One writer says that to hear her and her sister talk of God one would suppose they were spiritual masters. Nazari traces her love of spiritual reading back to her fifth year. He says she displayed the most noble horror of sin and attraction for virtue that could be conceived in a mere infant.

They used to play at being saints; there were hermitages you never could dream of under the tangled vines at the foot of the garden. Mother was consulted about their going to a desert place to live for God alone, — Angela's idea, her sister consenting. Finally, — was it at mother's suggestion? — they built their cell in the Thebaid of the upstairs room, where they managed to find a few square feet of comfortable solitude; and when Signora Merici, at her baking in the living-room below, heard the young voices singing some canticle, such as the laborers used to sing of an evening before the street-corner Madonnas<sup>14</sup> in those days of simple faith, she smiled in her heart and knew all was well.

To this budding love of retirement began to be added austerities. "Sometimes," Beetemé says, "they deprived themselves of a breakfast or a supper; sometimes they did not touch the food they liked the best; often, they rose to pray before the rising hour; and then they would pass the night upon tables, upon chairs, or even stretched upon the floor."<sup>15</sup> Adds Madame Girelli: "A loving and

<sup>14</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, V, 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Life of Angela Merici*, by Abbé Beetemé.

temperate mother had to moderate the little girls."<sup>16</sup> She could not approve of a self-denial that threatened health. She succeeded fairly well with the elder sister but not so with Angela. When she was seven she said she was never going to sleep in a bed again. Was it a prophecy — for the future? As a growing child, they found her praying in the middle of the night. Finally, they noticed her health declining. Her father put the question to her; blushing at the idea of falsehood, the child told the truth bravely. John Merici praised her sincerity, "But, daughter," he said, with unmistakable emphasis, "we must have no more of these doings." So she had to obey.

But it was only for a time. A stronger power than father or mother was drawing her in the depths of her soul. A life was opening out to her feet the mysterious impelling of which no man can explain. "Go, sell all thou hast, and come follow Me." The parish priest, Padre de Gondi, had noticed the child, had listened to the anxious doubts of father and mother, had begun to reason with the would-be martyr and finally helped to guide her into a better regulated path.

#### IV

But here was to be a career set in the midst of the most violent reactions. When she was nine years old, happened one of those dramatic episodes so characteristic of the Middle Ages, touching Desenzano with alarm. On the thirteenth of August, three hundred mountaineers came swooping down on the province like a scourge, under the Lord of Lodrone, — archers and foot-soldiers, with long beards and ferocious looks, frightening the children. They terrorized the women, raided the homesteads, sacked and burned. The Commune in alarm closed the schools and the palaces amid outcry of women with their little ones in their arms. Another sunset and it was all over. The people, rid of the terror, made great rejoicing with public collations<sup>17</sup> of confetti and sweets, and much quaffing of Malvoisie among the better class, John Merici among them. The entire countryside sounded to Festa, castle to castle responding

<sup>16</sup> Elisabetta Girelli: *Della Vita di A. Merici*. Brescia, 1871, 4th ed.

<sup>17</sup> Melga's unedited *Chronicle*, in Odorici, IX, 309, 310.

all through the Brescian province, in violent joy. This was perhaps the first of a lifetime of alarms to which Angela's nature had to be attuned, little as she may have grasped of all that was going on. She would need to acquire a placidity for the work which life held in store for her.

Salvatori describes her in her tenth year. He notices her beauty of countenance, her natural grace of carriage, and above all, her hair, of a fine and fair loveliness, that promised to make of her a rare beauty. "Indeed, however liberal grace had been with her, nature had shown itself equally bounteous," says he. But she was unconscious that anyone was thinking about her.

Meanwhile, the exterior fabric of her life was part of that moving, glowing existence which made of the northern Italy of her day a flashing summary of Renaissance impulses. When she had become of an age to trudge along behind her brother driving his herd of asses down the dusty highway carrying their grain to port, her demure little figure added one more item to the varied life around her. The squad of foreign soldiery, the market-woman basket on back, the nobleman's retinue that stared down upon her as she passed, were part of her familiar outlook upon life. Life in its breadths early took hold upon her mind and sympathies. In the normal Christian home of John Merici, she saw and experienced all that was pertinent to healthy young joy. If she herself inclined to asceticism, it was not because she did not play with real flesh-and-blood children, just as her sister did.

To these young people it would have been inconceivable to consider religion as a single spoke in the great wheel of life. She grew up to womanhood at a time when the household of the faith was still intact. If the people danced, it was under the shadow of the Campanile; if they dined it was within warning sound of the bell. The parish was like a family wherein the virtuous were folk to be proud of, and the delinquent to be chastised, a matter in which the kindly offices of the whole town were often enlisted.

The spirit of gayety was the atmosphere which she breathed in girlhood. One of the lively old games, always popular among both young and sedate folk, showed the quality of their light-heartedness. It was called *Le Poste al Paradiso*, in which the old men hobbled,

and the women snickered; they rang bells, — "The Bells of Heaven," and crashed tambourines with canes — "The Rattle of Hell," while all the children sang gay little rhythms.

*"Ôna le dò, le tre canele  
Che sonava le campanele  
Che sonava loril lorillo  
Che sonava le ventitrè,  
Ôna, dò, e trè!"*

"One, two, three!" whereupon old and young scrambled for places, the unlucky one being dropped out: Heaven forbid he was consigned to Hell!

Whether Angela preferred austerities to dancing and games, which is not at all likely, the experience served to teach her of the sound goodly heart that may beat under a light exterior.

Not the least fun in these Brescian girls' lives was the vintage merrymaking, the dancing and singing around the huge vats piled high with grapes, where twice a day for several days the bare-legged boys and girls would dance about in the enormous vessels, stamping upon the grapes, the air heavy with fumes of fermentation from fruit bubbling up in fragrant purple streams. The Brescians were a temperate race. Although the ancient songs, such as *Le Donna Lombarda*, bespeak a people of hot passion, still many a fireside admonition in their folk-lore shows the tendency to moderation.

"Peace holds to the middle," they would say.

And not less dear to the heart of Angela and the other Brescian damsels were the sheep of their native hills. For these, too, the sanction of religion was sought every year.

"He who presents a lamb at Easter," they had heard their grand-sires say, "shall have food enough for a twelvemonth!"

So the giving of the Easter lamb was an event.

And truly, Solomon in all his glory never held a more beautiful inheritance than did these simple peasants. Even the hostile Philip de Commines, riding down upon Lombardy with the French armies, fairly gloated over its richness in corn and fruit.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Memoires de Philippe de Commines*, Bohn Edition.

The Parish Plays, which were managed for amusement as well as profit, figured within the range of Angela's experience, for the drama had not as yet migrated from the Church to the market place or banquet hall. The young girl must have seen the Easter and the Christmas plays, perhaps at Desenzano, perhaps at Salò, or it might be, not until she came to Brescia or Venice. To her family it was half interest and all devotion. And what then did she see on the Feast of Kings in the morning? It must have been some such sight as this: suspended from the roof of the church hangs a great star made of shining candles that blink wonderfully into the eyes of the children. Then the three Kings — priests or choir boys — enter the church from the north, south and east, with their gold, incense, and myrrh. They see the star and follow to the high altar, singing

*"Stella fulgae rutilat."*

They then kiss each other and chant in Latin,

*"Let us go and seek for Him."*

Down the nave they pass, the people following. Meanwhile a picture of the Madonna has been placed over the high altar. The Magi return, singing

*"Ecce stella in oriente! — Behold the star in the east."*

They meet two grave ecclesiastics in dalmatics, and a quaint dialogue follows:

*"Who are these led by the star?"*

and the Magi chant:

*"We, whom you see, are Kings of Tarsus and Arabia and Saba, bringing gifts to the Christ!"*

Then they in dalmatics:

*"Behold the Child whom you seek, the Redeemer of the world!"*



They present the gifts; the procession starts out once more, returning up the side, and the Mass of Epiphany is celebrated.<sup>19</sup>

## V

At the Guild-hall, the Scuola, where Angela went sometimes with her mother, either to feastings or to follow as the women did in the big Guild processions, the diversion was of a gayer nature. John Merici, "Notable" of Desenzano, had his share in the responsibilities of his Guild, and his children, theirs in its merry-makings. If Angela was shy of them, her sturdy brother was no whit behind his age and kept her well informed. Perhaps her father's and uncle's dealings with the men of the neighborhood, observed all unaware by this retiring child, implanted early in her character that tendency, later on so marked, to seek counsel of men of solid experience and discrimination.

The quiet existence at Desenzano was broken now and then by visits to Salò, fourteen miles away, the road along the lake. The Biancosi cousins here seem to have been attached to her all her life, so the goings and comings in early childhood must have been one of the broadening, refreshing influences of that part of her career. It was such fun to tease their demure little cousin with sly innuendoes at her mortifications at table and to mimic her seriousness. Boys are very much the same always, and how could those strapping Biancosi lads, with their swaggering talk of the Venetian soldiery, be expected to know that their pretty little victim was destined one day to be a canonized saint of the Church? Precious little were they thinking of sanctity!

Angela loved to go to Salò. She always heard there new things about the higher life with which she was secretly enamoured, but she carried home, also, an ever deepening impression of evil in the world. And as she sat on the doorstep at home of an evening, silent amidst the quiet of the lizards and glowworms that haunt an Italian vineyard, she dreamed of vague things as yet too large and remote to savor of reality.

<sup>19</sup> See Chambers, *Mediaeval Stage*. Also, Gasquet in *Parish Life before the Reformation*. Molmenti, *op. cit.*, p. 22, says: "Down to the close of the 15th century,

It was at this time that she first told her sister she would never marry. One day, her biographers say, she was with some little girls of twelve or thirteen, when one of them playing caressingly with her beautiful light hair exclaimed — "Oh, Angela, your hair will bring you a good suitor some day. You will get along in the world!" She was thunderstruck. She had never thought of such a thing.

"I will never marry," she said.

But she was deeply troubled. Following the instincts of her soul she went home, shut herself in the room with the big fireplace, and gathered together a quantity of soot from the chimney and rafters. Secretly she stirred this in boiling water, and having evaded the eyes of her mother, she washed all her lovely hair in this brackish mixture, to ruin its glory once and for all. She was going to take care it should never be so beautiful again.

It had now come time for her First Communion. She was about to enter her thirteenth year. She seemed to have an instinctive fear of any self-indulgence that could enervate her spirit. To the charm of her face was added a vivacity of features and manners that made her appearance very attractive, and the personal magnetism that afterwards characterized her was beginning to assert itself. She was just of an age when the passions begin to awaken. A rich, exuberant nature, a gifted temperament and inheritance, a strong will were hers. Most lovable herself, she was ready to love everything. She came of a race where youth matures early, where the blossoms and fruit of womanhood follow close upon the fleeting bud. The vitality of her nature was at the very point to clash with that rare asceticism which had marked her childhood with early promise. It was the moment when Grace was most needed.

From the first, relates Girelli, Holy Communion, received as it was in those days, at long intervals, seemed to give her strength to go all day without food; or at least she showed no inclination for other food. Dame Merici restrained her as best she could but so notable was the change in the child that she feared, for the finger of God seemed very apparent. Angela displayed insatiable hunger for that Living Bread. She thought of it all the time; she talked of

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Mysteries or Miracles in the churches or public squares, upon temporary platforms, continued to hold their own."

it to her mother. She chafed against custom that kept her soul dissatisfied. She used to spend hours alone near the high altar. She learned through excess of yearning the divine art of spiritual Communion. Over and over again she kept turning in her mind how she could contrive to receive Communion oftener. Her parents, perhaps at the suggestion of the confessor, no longer dared interfere with her spiritual propensities.

Sometimes, her biographers say, she would pass an entire week after such sustenance without partaking of ordinary food. This strange thing, together with her instinctive shrinking from marriage at the dawn of adolescence, were the first evidences to the world that there really was something out of the ordinary in this little damsel.

Did she elude her mother's watchful eye? Or was Donna Merici but covering the anxiety, the perplexity lurking in her heart, to see this young girl, rosy, hearty, gay, to all appearance none the worse, indeed, markedly the better for this abnormal abstention. "Wait," said Padre de Gondi, "we shall see." The facts are attested by the sworn depositions for Angela's Beatification. Is it to be for a moment supposed that any mother in any age heedlessly permitted her fourteen-year-old daughter to go without her meals three times a day for seven days? How then was it managed? How did this nascent little general of the Company of St. Ursula manoeuvre to evade the vigilance of Donna Merici? If it were not the pretext of a hasty errand at meal time, it might have been a platter quietly emptied into the donzella's lap, for the benefit of the beggars who knew so well the road that turned up to Merici's. The future commander of so daring a campaign was practicing a little strategy.

The twinkle of her mirth was dissolved in tears, however, when at High Mass on Sundays that strange interior longing again disturbed her, and her young soul lay mute, as is the way of young souls, between the tremendous forces of mystical joy and a great presage. The neighbors of Desenzano nudged each other as she came out of church: "Look! there is that girl of Merici's."

Merici and his wife understood after a little while that their fair-haired darling was under the spell of a spirit who would be obeyed.



THE BIRTHPLACE OF ANGELA MERICI OUTSIDE DESENZANO





Angela was now fifteen. It seemed as if life in that tranquil household would flow on forever, in the same, full, untroubled, wholesome serenity.

## VI

But suddenly John Merici died. A malignant fever carried him off, with a few short days' notice just as he was approaching his fortieth year, hale and vigorous. In that brief week the face of the whole world changed. The tragedy of death lay over the vineyards and brooded in the lonely rooms, chilling the joyous soul of the young Angela. The family met the blow with Christian resignation, but for long years that burial knell was to echo in Angela's soul as the solemn beginning of the great detachments of life.

As Signor Merici had possessed some estate,<sup>20</sup> the problem that presented itself in the little homestead was not only sorrowful but complicated, and since Signora Merici herself, though capable, never seemed to rally from the prostration caused by her husband's death,<sup>21</sup> the two daughters gave themselves up to sustaining their mother, so that Angela began in these circumstances, young as she was, to develop that sense of the practical and that executive ability which, later on, characterized her.

The distractions of everyday life proved a blessing to her, holding her balanced, at a time when the spiritual world and the thought of the hereafter was absorbing her with irresistible compulsion. She naturally began to lean upon her eldest sister, to look up to her as to the brain of the place, the support in this broken life, but in a very short time, with appalling swiftness, it seemed, the sister too died. Poor Angela was stunned. To this period tradition ascribes one of those mystical occurrences of her experience,<sup>22</sup> which, though recorded, who shall attempt to explain? To whom and when she made it known, or if she ever concealed it, so confiding and frank her nature was in youth, will ever be uncertain. Be that as it may, they show you today not far from Lake Garda a small ruined chapel which was in the first glow of enthusiasm after

<sup>20</sup> See Bertolotti, *Storia di S. A. Merici*, pp. 38, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Girelli, § 6, *Della Vita di A. Merici*.

<sup>22</sup> Bull of Canonization in *Spirit of St. Angela*, p. 14; also Salvatori, p. 10; also Girelli, § 5; see also M. Vincentia Neusee, *Die Heilege A. Merici*. Note A Appendix.

her death erected on the spot traditionally associated with the event. It seems that Angela was one day going along the country road, about a mile and a half from town, to carry lunch to the laborers in the fields. She had her mind full of the great sorrows that had befallen her, and in the Italian fashion, she stopped a few moments to pray by the wayside, when, like a flash she was carried off her feet by an apparition of luminous beings, among whom she distinguished her dead sister, while a sensible voice spoke to her words of consolation and light.

The tumble-down chapel on the Machetto road outside Desenzano bears witness to this ancient and interesting tradition. Salvatori notes how "a prodigious interior grace reinvigorated the young girl's soul,"<sup>23</sup> in consequence of it; this, as mystical writers hold, is the test of true supernatural vision.

Not long after, her mother died. It had scarcely been a year.

Angela, and the remaining sister, who seemed to depend upon her, wan, pathetic figures, followed the dead mother to her resting place and turned back, hand in hand, to the dear old home, whence the light and joy had thus early fled forever. Happily they could go with the Biancosi to Salò and there, under the anxious care of their devoted uncle, they took up the thread of a new and quite different existence.

Signor Biancosi was a man of ability and position in the town of Salò, wielding considerable influence in public affairs, and the Biancosi house was comfortable, as became the rank of its owner, whose family, in the course of time, intermarried with the Bertalozzi, the Counts Lanfranchi, and the Counts of Tracagno.

And moreover, Salò itself was a place of some importance. There had always existed, as Angela well knew, a certain amount of friction and jealousy between the towns of Salò and Desenzano down the lake, principally because Desenzano, celebrated justly for its grain market and proud of its importance as a centre, endured with ill-will the political primacy of Salò,<sup>24</sup> for Desenzano was at that time the richest and most populous place along the water.<sup>25</sup> But

<sup>23</sup> Salvatori, *Vita della S. Madre A. Merici*, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ulisse Papa: *Venezia*, in *Archivio Veneto*, XIX, Aug., 1888.

<sup>25</sup> Gratarola, a 16th century writer, speaks of the fine hotels in Desenzano, and its houses, "sumptuously painted outside."

what constituted Salò's greater importance was that the supreme magistrate of the whole Riviera, the Syndic, resided there with his council. They must have conducted a lively and bustling correspondence with Venice, for Angela used to see their public couriers leaving Salò every Wednesday and Saturday for Venice, returning every Tuesday and Friday with great hubbub;<sup>26</sup> besides this, the Riviera maintained in Venice in a house of their own, a Nuncio, with other special Nuncios on notable occasions.

The ideal of family life stood high in the esteem of the mediaeval Italians, and in Salò as elsewhere, often whole neighborhoods or streets of a town were inhabited by branches of the same family, while the head added to the dignity of his personality by going about accompanied by his worthy kinsmen.<sup>27</sup> So it is not a matter of surprise to find Signor Biancosi, who was sincerely attached to his dead sister, gathering these of Biancosi blood beneath his own roof.

And what were these young girls like during the impressionable years which they spent amid the stir of the busy town of Salò?

The Contessa Evelyn Cesaresco-Martinengo, in her book of Lombard Studies, has a picture of a group of Brescian peasant girls from her estates near Salò on Lake Garda, girls with strongly marked faces, showing what might be considered the detail of the native feminine type. It is interesting to compare these with the young girls painted by the Brescian artist contemporary with Angela Merici, Bonvicini, who worked for years in her neighborhood. The study reveals a face rather round, the head itself being round, the brow full and serene, and wide between the eyes: these are deep set in the head, slightly almond-shaped, dark, with full sweeping lids and lashes; the chin softly rounded, lips thinner than those of the southern girl, more flexible and sensitive; the nose slightly re-trousseé. The hair is commonly parted in the middle, waving softly down to the ears.<sup>28</sup> Comtesa Martinengo's peasant girls are, to be

<sup>26</sup> Ulisse Papa, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> "The father of a family will be much more regarded if followed by many of his people, than will he who goes alone." Alberti, *Del Governo della Famiglia*, 1470, in *Source-Book of the Renaissance*.

<sup>28</sup> In Moretto's great paintings, St. Ursula and Virgins, St. Cecilia with the Saints, The Madonna in Glory, and his S. Nicolo with the Roncaglia Children, is to be found this same face, full of calm beauty and vigor.

sure, coarser than these types of Moretto's, with stronger features, but one or two of hers, at least, resemble the artist's. What is of peculiar interest here is that the authentic portrait of Angela Merici and her death-mask both bear decided resemblance to this type, while even the ideal pictures of her by Calcinardi, in Milan and Desenzano, follow similar lines, all pointing to a traditional feminine type of physique.

The inventory of personal qualities considered desirable in a 15th century Italian girl such as the two Mericis, is provided in the Medici collection of letters, where there is a pen-sketch of a little maid, fifteen-year-old Claricia degli Orsini of Rome, who was being considered at the moment as future bride for the Medici heir. "As I was going to St. Peter's on Thursday," writes the prospective mother-in-law in Rome, in 1468, "I met the Madonna Maddalena Orsini with her daughter, fifteen or sixteen years old, but as she was veiled, I could not see her so well as I wished. . . . Yesterday I went to see Monsignor Orsini" (the girl's uncle). "His sister entered the room with her young daughter. . . . She is, I think, above middle height, of fair complexion, and her manners are very agreeable. If less beautiful than our own three girls, she is possessed of great modesty, so that it will be easy to teach her our own ways. . . . She is not exactly blonde, for no one is so here; but her hair is thick and has a reddish tinge. Her face is round but not unpleasing. She has a well shaped neck, but rather thin and delicately proportioned; her bosom I could not see for they cover it quite over in Rome. Her hands are long and graceful. On the whole, the girl seems to be certainly above the ordinary," concludes this mediaeval mother-in-law, with proverbial bias, "but she is not in any way to be compared with our Bianca, Nannina, or even with Maria!"

"Agreeable manners," "great modesty," and "docile"; such are the points summed up in this inventory; fair complexion, and the fashionable reddish hair of the Renaissance art; the shapeliness of physique extolled by the Renaissance connoisseurs; this is the type chosen for a Medici bride, the cynosure of Florentine culture. And of much the same pattern are the richly-clad, demure-looking damsels, daughters of Sciarra Martinengo in Brescia, whom Moretto



painted a few years later. You see them seated on the balustrade of the Palazzo Martinengo in a painting exhibited in the same ancestral palace. Angela was like these.

## VII

If the women of the Biancosi blood moved in and out of this life at Salò we read nothing of them, and there seems to have been no one of them closely associated with the young Mericis. It would appear that Angela fell quietly into the daily routine, few suspecting how ill at ease she really was. Soon she found her way to the churches, the beautiful old Franciscan church of San Bernardino, a favorite haunt, for the brown robe had been familiar to her childhood.

Her sister, alert in all the new diversions she found in Salò, yielded to Angela's leading spirit. Whatever Angela proposed to do was so much more alluring than what she herself could have devised and it nearly always seemed to turn out well. Angela had secretly decided to join the Third Order of St. Francis, who were very popular all over Italy.

But it was not so easy to obtain her uncle's permission. He might not have refused so peremptorily a daughter of his own, but this girl, motherless and fatherless, must be handled with more caution. Could it be that she was left too much alone? There were plenty of gay young relatives to be found, some of whom evinced fondness for their cousin Angela all through her after life. The Biancosi home was more lively than was quite to her taste. The hallways were full of voices; laughter rang from the balconies. The immemorial fun at the expense of the fair sex prevailed in the proverbs of Salò town. They used to say, "Girls, geese and sparrows, talk much and say little." They found the young girl troublesome and complex; she was so unstable: "Girls are like candle light; they have tears by the bushel, and lies to explain them!" Yet there are snatches of old song that show how much in demand was this same little Brescian maiden! <sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Rosa refers to Malvezzi's *Chronicle* in which is preserved a love-song as early as 1300, throbbing with the passion, the treachery and tragedy of the race, its mad impulse, its hot revenge.



Young Bartolomeo Biancosi and his brothers then began a merry war on Angela's retirement. They begged, they teased, they lured her upon excursions, they sang to her, they consulted her upon the cut of a doublet, the set of a sash. They invaded her room with perfumes and worldly fripperies. She stood it with as good grace as she could muster; she loved these honest cousins and was used to the teasing; but as the days passed and they did not seem to tire, she suddenly hit upon a device that was most unexpected. It came about in this way. During these first months of Angela's life at Salò, she more than once found herself in the great crowd of people gathered from all the neighboring towns, as the custom then was, sometimes to the number of many thousands, to hear the great preaching Friars.<sup>30</sup> Early in the morning the market square would be thronged, hours before the sermon began out in the open. Every house-door and balcony, every coign of vantage was teeming with eager faces, so immensely popular these itinerant preachers were. Their appearance set the whole countryside astir; shops were closed, and the churches not being large enough to hold the concourse, an open air rostrum had to be contrived. Hour after hour the throng stood patiently hanging upon the speaker's words. The friars spoke in the simplest language. They told anecdotes of daily life and personal experience. Sometimes they scolded or sternly rebuked the people. The crowds that gathered to hear them showed how exactly they hit off the taste of their audience. They denounced the worldliness of the day, calling the people to a penitential life. They warned parents to look out for their children. They rebuked the sins of the wealthy, the masques, indecencies, the dishonesty and corruption in high places. They pointed to the curse of the plague stalking grimly through Italy and soon to desolate these beautiful regions. "It is the wrath of God," they said.

Angela and her sister trembled with the rest. The pure young girl began to feel the weight of the world's sins. A trouble, a dismay, filled her. She no longer had her mother to reassure her. The strangeness of this new life came over her anew with an overwhelming sense, and she longed to get away from it, to go off where there

<sup>30</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, V, 177; Zanelli, in *Predicatori in Brescia nel quattrocento*, gives a graphic account of the preachers and their influence on the Brescians; the people adored them. See *Arch. Stor. Lomb.* 1901.

was no one but the open country and God. She felt sure she could live thus; she knew there were men and women living it, here and there, all through that beautiful countryside.<sup>31</sup>

So she and her sister decided they would break away and be anchoresses. And they went, they disappeared, the two girls. That night there was confusion in the Biancosi mansion; frantic inquiries, and the sound of running feet, sharp orders, the click of spurs and galloping of horses, the shouts of link-boys and the flare of torches, weeping of maids and terror of apprehension. Signor Biancosi stood still not a moment; Bartolomeo was pale; where were the Merici children? The bargemen at the port had seen nothing of them. The waters of the lake splashed up against the piers in merciless silence.

On the two girls trudged, with the heedlessness that belongs only to saints and children, indifferent to the consternation they had left behind, thinking only of their visionary goal, with a relief as of a long-contemplated step, taken once for all.

Curious anomaly and yet genuinely human, was this insurmountable inclination of Angela Merici to bury herself and be lost in God, when her actual vocation in life was precisely the contrary — an incessant duty in the workaday world of men and women. How many spend half their lives thinking they would do better in another field, yet only half-conscious of the signal work they are accomplishing in the sphere where Providence has placed them. The peasantry along the country lanes looked curiously at the two. As twilight came on, they were climbing the foothills' rose-trellised terraces. Did Angela lie all night gazing up at the stars in an ecstasy of delight? Did angelic faces once more lean out of heaven to speak to her?

Alas no! the spell had already been broken; some one had told the tale, passed on from mouth to mouth, and Signor Biancosi's messengers quickly caught up the clue, so their uncle came and found them. Gently, with all loving kindness, he persuaded them to go

<sup>31</sup> *A. Merici* by M. Vincentia, Innsbruck. "On March 21, 1487, Angela's fourteenth birthday, Blessed Nicholas of Flue died after a hermit's life of seclusion at Ranft. His fame had reached the southern foothills of the Alps. He was familiarly known as Brother Claus. Some biographers think Angela was impressed to follow his example and seek a retired life."

back home, not laughing, but wisely reasoning with them about the dangers lurking in the fastnesses of the hills for a young girl and a little one, who looked bravely up into her uncle's face yielding with confidence to his decision. The story was noised abroad, and when the peasants heard that these two innocents were seeking a hermitage, mothers threw up their hands. "Santa del Paradiso," the little children began to call her. This search for a hermitage is recorded in the Bull of her Canonization.

Signor Biancosi showed himself remarkably prudent in these perplexing circumstances. He convinced his children that every opportunity for solitude and prayer could be had, if they desired it, safe at home in their own apartments. Angela's common sense being appealed to, no doubt, she came to realize that her kind uncle deserved better of them than to have it insinuated that his sister's children could not live happily under his roof. He must somehow have encouraged in her some sense of responsibility, and fortunately, he succeeded in arousing her to take interest in the ordering of his household. So the child regained her equilibrium. It was a serious moment in the development of her character and the training of her mind.

"At Salò," quotes Madame Girelli,<sup>32</sup> "she did not dispense herself from the household duties. She set her room in order, assisted with the wash, helped make the bread, carried water, assorted the linens, and did all sorts of menial services with great serenity of countenance. We see in her a strong soul, a robust mind, magnanimous sacrifices, and holy works." It is to be borne in mind that even a high-born lady in the middle ages was trained to a life of practical utility. "There," as the Bull of Canonization rather naïvely says, "the two sisters preached that which they could not have done in the desert."<sup>33</sup> The burgher class such as the Mericis and Biancosis, strictly conservative, held to the practical.

"When they marry," says Paolo di Ser Pace, sternly, "when they marry, let it not be said of them that they came out of the woods."<sup>34</sup> He would have them well-dressed, and he adds flatly,

<sup>32</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 6.

<sup>33</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Paolo di Ser Pace: *Book of Good Examples and Good Manners*, 14th century, in Ricardiana Library, quoted by Biagi, *Men and Manners of old Florence*, p. 67.

"Do not let them grow too fat!" He expects them to be their own modistes: "Teach them to spin and to sew, to weave, to cut out garments, to embroider. But first, they must make bread, sift grain, cook, and perform all the work of the household. And moreover, they are not to fail to . . . make the beds, . . . to put new feet upon the hose, and all such like things. . . ." In short, Ser Pace, beginning where modern education ends, preaches a thorough course in domestic economy. And such was the mode at the Biancosis'.

### VIII

One cannot pass over these years of transition from girlhood into womanhood, without some interest in Angela's schooling. Did she not attend some little parish school at Desenzano, trudging her two miles with her brothers? There is dearth of record. Nazari, Brescian notary, who compiled the earliest account of her, based upon the depositions, said she was never taught the alphabet, she never studied Latin nor any other science, but that still she read both in Latin and Italian. She was born before skill in penmanship ceased to be the accomplishment of the few; it was not so much ignorance as a custom, to have your writing done by deputy, a custom which did not die out for a century or two later. Thus, it is not strange that she had a secretary do all her writing for her. And yet, it is worthy of note, that many of her class did write, as through the diaries of just such people as the Biancosis, we have today the best substantial account of Italian family life and customs in the age of the Renaissance.<sup>35</sup>

Many children learn to read without a teacher. Showing as she did from babyhood such avidity for the spiritual reading given in their family circle, it may well be imagined how she delighted in the privilege of poring over these treasured books, and now with her clear young brain she soon learned to spell out the characters that opened such wonders to her young imagination.

Then too, after the time of Dante, the new poetry and literature,

<sup>35</sup> *E.g.*, Datini, Florentine merchant, d. 1410; Belcati, Public Commissioner, d. 1484; Rucellai, merchant, 1467 circ.; Bisticci, bookseller; Landucci, apothecary, d. 1491; cf. Pastor, *History of the Popes*, Vol. V, pp. 11-23.



the flowering out of the vernacular, were in the hands of all Italy,<sup>36</sup> and that long before printing was invented. A large number of manuscripts of the very best belonged to Florentine artisans<sup>37</sup> which shows the culture that had filtered through to the solid strata of Italian society.

Salò had good schools,<sup>38</sup> and its young men were often at the University of Padua; the people of the whole Riviera were, as a class, proverbially intellectual. Still, coming to Salò at the age of fifteen, Angela was no longer to be considered a school-girl, and the education which remained for her now in her uncle's home was purely domestic.<sup>39</sup>

Signor Biancosi, a man devout by natural bent, came of the class who were interested in municipal affairs, who made some pretence of cultivating the arts, and of enjoying public life. His position threw him into the many-sided activities of politics, or economics, or fashion. Besides this, the people at Salò were of a different class from those the girl had known as a child at Desenzano. There was wealth at Salò. Its strategical importance to Brescia in the Middle Ages, and its proximity to the Riviera, the fashionable residential district of the lake region, together with the rich traces and relics of splendor in the adornment of its churches and public buildings, all point to the existence of a wealthy and cultivated class of people, that left a distinct impression upon the mild but strong-willed girl, who, broken loose from all the moorings of her young heart, was suddenly precipitated upon this social center. The effect upon her mind in after years was, perhaps, a larger vision, a more daring initiative.

## IX

At Salò the fashionable Riviera begins, ending at Gargnano, the road running close along the margin of the lake under avenues of laurel, one long line of dwellings, villas, and palaces, from which streams constantly, as if by enchantment, a great flow of people.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Burckhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Vol. II, p. III.

<sup>37</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> G. Solitro, *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> Pastor notes that the popular use of Latin made it easy for all classes to take part in the Church service, as it is in Italy even at the present day.

<sup>40</sup> G. Solitro, *op. cit.*



The water diversions at command on Lake Garda were dreams of delight. Notables, citizens, country folk, fishermen, all revelled in them.<sup>41</sup> From town to town they went by water along Lake Garda, from Gargnano to Salò, by fishing boats to Desenzano, out across the blue rippling waters, for Garda rarely is calm. Many a time must the young Angela Merici have trailed a girlish hand through its dripping coolness. On the Lago in her day, the festive gondolas bore gilded prows and gay awnings with floating bannerets, such as one may see in Costa's fifteenth century paintings of this beautiful lake,<sup>42</sup> and every boatload had its musicians, preferably guitarists, lutanists, so that the Brescian girls must often have thrilled to the enchantment of the scene as they watched the pastoral dances on the shore, over against the hedges of box and yew.

From the Riviera Road, a hundred winding ways and little lanes lead to gay old mansions, storied and picturesque, where one may take one's ease amid balsamed airs, delicious fruits, and delightful promenades. Where did Angela's uncle live? Was his home on the site of one of those modest houses clustered down in the town, fronting on the narrow winding streets, with perhaps a vine-hung court-yard sloping down to the quaint gateway on the water where sleepy boats swayed all day long? Or, was it some villa farther up the heights among laurel and pines?

In such a land even the poor could dwell in bowers fit for the Sultan of Ispahan! With the gay folk of the Riviera flitting through Salò like birds of passage, there must have been an endless current of thought and interest, especially in those stirring days before the sleep of centuries settled down upon the little town.

She heard them talk of Pope and Emperor, Venice and Milan, and the League, which shifted combinations with kaleidoscopic rapidity, involving tremendous issues, plots and intrigues, the discord and foment of human passions. In 1492 she was eighteen years old. That year the election of Pope Alexander VI was held in Rome. In

<sup>41</sup> Emp. Fred. III, during Angela's childhood, pronounced the silver trout of Garda and the scent of the golden lemons unsurpassable! Fashionable Venetians made of it a dish for the immortals, cooked in white wine, and strewn with citron flowers.

<sup>42</sup> Painters of the period, Perugino, Mantegna, and others, have set forth these idyllic scenes.

Milan all the bells were ringing with joy.<sup>43</sup> They told of the splendid coronation that summer, of the wonders of costliness in hangings and arches and festivities. Nor could she have failed to hear the talk of those who were denouncing the bribery and worldliness in ecclesiastical circles. As the news spread of the irresistible stream of foreign looters, the invaders of Italy, it created indescribable consternation. Popular report exaggerated the army into a countless host and told tales of giants and savages and invincible weapons. The next year, on Palm Sunday, April 12, the Biancosi heard in the church the solemn proclamation of the Holy League, which the provinces of Lombardy had now joined, and for which they were called upon to furnish eight thousand horsemen and one thousand foot-soldiers, half a dozen of Biancosi blood. What a buzz of excitement in Salò! And then, the next winter came reports that the Eternal City had been almost destroyed by the worst inundation of the Tiber<sup>44</sup> known to the oldest inhabitant, and characteristic of the time, they said that a terrible monster with two faces and a human body had been found on its banks! From mouth to mouth these stories passed with gloomy forebodings.

This life of constant menace must have been misery to a young girl like Angela Merici.

The scandals of the Sforzas, the greed of the Venetian Republic, the menace of the Turks, the miracles of saints, the intoxication of the new culture, formed a jumble of ideas warring at her ears incessantly, while she wished she could quiet the pulse of the whole big breathless world. But what could a mere girl do? She heard them tell of prominent people, noble, ingenious and learned persons, who had openly abandoned their faith in God and ridiculed it in others. She heard them tell of the rage for setting up heathen gods in the niche where saints<sup>45</sup> had smiled for centuries upon the people, and shuddered with disgust at the talk of master-artists painting into the pictures of the Madonna and the saints the faces of low wicked women of the town.<sup>46</sup> All this was but foam on the edge of the conversation around her.

Mothers were only too glad to see their daughters share her

<sup>43</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 389, 390.

<sup>44</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, pp. 475 and 480.

<sup>45</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>46</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

friendship. It was inevitable that Angela at the age of seventeen or eighteen should become even for the best and noblest youths of her native province of Brescia an object of affection, and just as natural that her uncle should look with favor on some at least of the suitors,<sup>47</sup> but Angela had always said that she would never marry.

Yet as far as record goes, she never expressed a desire to enter the cloister. She did not let go of companionship. Among the scanty incidents that have come down to us, there is scarcely one that does not represent her either as leading someone else, or dreaming of doing it. The belles of the Riviera might sit for hours in the sun on their balconies bleaching their tresses with the latest French medicated waters,<sup>48</sup> but this simple damsel, with her golden-crowned head poised in meek grace, had only to pass through the streets to the Franciscan church, for every eye to follow her all unheeded.

## X

Whatever may be thought about the matter, the strong contrast between a happy, natural home-life, and an uncertain, single life of constant self-denial could scarcely have failed to present its difficulties, sooner or later, to a girl of Angela's intelligence. At this point there arose a crisis. God, says a modern biographer, may have permitted the occasion of a public and decided choice to arouse a fierce struggle in her soul.<sup>49</sup>

The psychology of adolescence<sup>50</sup> would find nothing abnormal in her mind being disturbed during these years, whether by reactions from the natural unfoldings in the delicate organism of a girl's physique, or from irregularity as regards nutrition and sleep under the long strain of mental worry and effort to subdue her unaccount-

<sup>47</sup> O'Reilly, *St. Angela Merici and the Ursulines*, p. 64.

<sup>48</sup> Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 128. French fashions: "At the time of the French invasion, there was a senseless idolatry of everything that came from France." . . . Vol. II, 125. Blonde hair: "The ideal color sought for was blonde, and the sun was supposed to fade hair."

<sup>49</sup> O'Reilly, *op. cit.*, pp. 64, 65.

<sup>50</sup> Boyd Barrett, *The New Psychology*, p. 121: "Adolescence, with its awakenings is often marked by neurasthenic symptoms . . . found in those otherwise healthy and robust; and every effort to find a physical source for it, has failed. In fact, all evidence goes to show that the disease is connected with the loss or waste of psychical energy."

able griefs. In the first place then, it would not require special acumen to foresee for this girl a crisis impending. However, it may not be so smoothly relegated to the realms of physiological research; for something definite and strange happened which Angela herself narrated to an intimate friend, happily, not of the loquacious sex, a friend who gave sworn testimony to substantiate his report.

It was twenty-eight years after Angela's death, that her old friend, Agostino Gallo, noble of Brescia, made the following statement under oath before a notary in that city. He was recounting what he recollected of Angela's opinions regarding the pretended mystics who were claiming to have had revelations and the like:

"The Madre explained to me very well this execrable error, by an instance that in her own early years, Satan had appeared to her in the form of an angel of such beauty as no one could ever believe or imagine. But that God took pity upon the purity of that sincere soul, and enlightened her: so that she suddenly threw herself face down upon the ground, crying 'Back into Hell, Enemy of the Cross! because I know that I am not worthy to see any angel of God.' And suddenly it disappeared: and this account was really the thing that convinced me more than anything that she was a great servant of God, — more than all the works I saw her do. For in her there was always a profound humility, the crown of all the other virtues, — all — since they are all empty when the basis of humility is not there."<sup>51</sup>

Close investigation of Gallo's testimony indicates that the experience in Angela's story must have been in the nature of an assault upon her virtue:<sup>52</sup> God took pity upon the purity of that innocent soul, he quotes her as saying. In such sense the very earliest biographer interpreted it, eight years before Gallo testified. The incident must have been, then, well known. Nazari tells it thus:

"Satan, enemy of the faithful, wishing in some way by deceit to make her fall, appeared to her in the form of an angel of such

<sup>51</sup> Deposition, Oct. 29, 1568. *Bertolotti*, p. 231.

<sup>52</sup> Salvatori and Girelli, the most authentic of the secondary authorities, the former having had access to the canonization papers, the latter to the traditions of Angela's birthplace, both state that her purity was tried; the Bull has it, that "the devil was playing the part of an angel of light trying to entrap her with semblance of some good." Salvatori, pp. 6, 1; Girelli, § 8; Bull of Canonization in Spirit of St. Angela, p. 15.



beauty as no one ever saw or could imagine. But God, who does not abandon His servants, enlightened her, so that suddenly she threw herself face down upon the floor . . . he disappeared.”<sup>53</sup>

But the Church canonizes virtues, not visions. The Church does not pass upon her saints’ spiritual experiences. She pronounces them men and women of heroic virtue, merely respecting in them the human quality of truth, which, after all, is virtue’s groundwork. As St. Gregory once wrote to the monk Augustine . . . “God has given us but one only sign by which we recognize His elect, and that is, that we love one another.”<sup>54</sup>

One cannot define what the mind of an individual conceives in believing that she beholds an apparition of a demon. Neither can one define what he sees when he is color-blind. The world swings on in twofold ignorance of material and immaterial, and sometimes counts it bliss. However, the psychology of adolescence often finds itself face to face with spheres of activity in which sex has no part whatever. Sex cannot explain all the mental phenomena of adolescence, because its own very manifest subjection to the human will is one of them. And sex, being limited by the material, fails entirely to explain what is highly rational or the spiritual activities which arise from the religious instinct and which are based upon the immaterial.

The psychical phenomena which the girl, Angela, might have been expected to experience are not on record; but, if we are to believe her own account, the one sworn to by Agostino Gallo, we think, can in no wise find explanation in sex-psychology. The only fear that was swaying her was an immaterial one, a fear of losing hold on her Maker; the only love that was inspiring her was a love of a higher spiritual good which she deliberately preferred, that instinctive integrity of the human being which every pure woman knows and of which Christ said, “He that can take, let him take it.” And His mother and His favorite disciple chose to take it.

Sex-instinct is subject to will, and in persons of heroic virtue, there is no doubt that it can often be so crushed and deadened that

<sup>53</sup> Nazari, *Relazione scritta nel 1560*, mss. Querini II, VII, 20, in Bertolotti, *Vita*, p. 215.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Joly, *Psychology of the Saints*, p. 79.



its presence ceases to be felt. So it fared with Angela Merici. And in whatever terms we prefer to accept or account for the crisis which her biographers set before us, it ended simply in this. The experience of conflict with downright temptation is one of too frequent occurrence in the lives of the saints to be dismissed here as improbable. Leader and teacher of chastity, she needed to know something of the difficulties of this great virtue; the incident gathered from her by word of mouth would seem to us the critical point of a protracted struggle.

Her reaction to this experience was most severe. Her biographers relate that after this she often made her day's meal of a piece of bread, dry and unpalatable, indeed, as she resolved not to touch wine. In severe cold,<sup>55</sup> the chill of an Italian climate, she would not warm herself at the fire. She managed, in the privacy of her own room, to make her bed on a mat upon the floor, sleeping as best she could, in between the frequent vigils which from childhood she had been in the habit of keeping; and sometimes, Madame Girelli tells us, "In order to overcome temptation, she would immerse her chemise in cold water and would wear it thus, all benumbed with the cold," and how this would stiffen her into pain could well be imagined. Madame Girelli shivers at the thought.

*"Immergeva in gelida acqua la sua camicia e se la poneva indossa. . . . O Dio! como dobbiamo arrossire di tante nostre delicatezze!"*

To explain the nerving of the will to such endurance in one so young, that is the problem. How are you to explain it? Not only the denial of the call of nature at the alluring moment, but the deliberate and consistent war against it, and the strength to sustain the conflict; how is this to be accounted for? Certainly not by any opposing law of nature; certainly not by any principle in the psychology of adolescence. "My grace is sufficient," — Christ's words, present the sole clue.

So, the siren pleasure wove her spells in laughter and love over Salò and the beautiful Riviera, in moonlight and the lilt of voices and lutes on the balconies, — for Salò had a passion for music, —

<sup>55</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 8.

the splash of oars upon silvery waters, light and glitter and show, while at the very heart of it all, one young girl with a courageous soul and a supernatural vocation, nerved herself to stand alone and looking these allurements squarely in the face, to say, "I will have none of you. I know something better."

Did her uncle notice her only meal on fast days, bread and a few nuts? Could he have guessed that she spent some nights with a stone for a pillow? And the Biancosi cousins, did they know just why they all held her in tender and constantly deepening reverence?

But days came now when Angela saw that her sister's nature was not of the kind to wrestle with this life, and after brief warning, one sacrifice more was demanded of this heroic girl. She buried her sister. And now she stood quite desolate.

She began to think of leaving Salò. During the last years of her sister's life, they had been able, with their uncle's help, to manage their small estate at Desenzano; but Angela who was almost twenty-three, thought now of going back there again to live, for she had kinsfolk and friends at Desenzano; among these, a certain young girl with whom Angela had often laid plans to lead a retired life, with leisure for spiritual and corporal works of mercy, so, they two decided to take up their life together in the old house where she had been born. At last she bade good-by to her reluctant relatives at Salò, and recrossed the threshold of her father's home to begin a new life. She had now been tempered by the sunshine and love of a happy home in childhood, followed by the reactionary bereavements and loneliness of her youth. At Salò she had learned to appreciate life's enrichments in joy and beauty; she had there acquired a balance against her own exaggerated asceticism, and had proven her own spiritual strength. At twenty-three her nature was ripe soil for seed that was new. She was ready for her great idea.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE VISION OF BRUDAZZO

#### I

NE finds little difficulty in conceiving the reluctance with which her cousins gave her up. Those associations formed during her impressionable years held Angela forever after bound to Salò, the dreamy, water-washed town of bright memories, so that its people and their affairs always held their place in her interest. Angela of Salò, one of the Popes called her. Once, at Eastertide, tradition tells, she went over to the Biancosis and on Holy Saturday was helping in the kitchen where they were preparing sweets for the feastday, a sort of fritter or cake usually served at Paschal time. But the following morning she did not desire to eat at all. In vain they coaxed. "Oh, I have my own meal all prepared," she cried gaily. At that instant there appeared at the door a messenger from a neighbor who had sent the donzella some pea-soup and a slice of bread. She had begged her own breakfast! "See now," she said, "how the good God takes care of me!" and the French biographer adds, "A rather slim fare for such a day!"

For so attractive a young woman to turn aside from the beaten path of worldlings to follow some mysterious call could not but impress profoundly the young folk of the Biancosi circle; and as roads were lacking in those days so that people went everywhere by means of the lake, many a maid of Salò found her way across the water to the Merici home. "Let us ask Angela Merici," they would say, as is the way of girls.

In those days before the household of the faith had been disrupted, counsel among men and women was taken as in a great family,<sup>1</sup> young with old and old with young, wherever it was possi-

<sup>1</sup> As many men as women consulted St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Catherine de Ricci, Veronica of Milan, Osanna of Mantua. The record books of Brescia show how often the citizens sent formal invitations to preachers noted for holy life to come to the pulpits of Brescia.

ble to obtain inspiration in the way of the Christian life. Nothing would so arouse the people as the cry "A Saint! A Saint."

It was more or less fashionable in the fifteenth century to take your neighbor, with certain limitations, into your confidence concerning your spiritual progress. "Fortify your soul by reading and meditation," said St. Antoninus to a penitent. "There is no harm in conversing with pious women, but do not trust everyone too readily,"<sup>2</sup> he adds with a certain patience.

And the old house itself! with what mingled feelings of early griefs and new hopes did its young mistress begin again the round of life within walls that seemed after her long absence, to ring with her dead sister's merry voice or the tones of her father's lute. But gradually she came to feel the breathing balm of silence, and by and by, as she and her companion went prayerfully about their work, the human pangs grew duller and the memories resolved themselves in this new era of grace which came and filled her mind. At last, free to follow the bent of her mind, Angela applied for admission into the Tertiaries of St. Francis and having fulfilled the prescribed year of probation, she went over to Lonato to be enrolled, as there was no Franciscan church in Desenzano. Her object in joining the Tertiaries was to obtain their spiritual privileges, especially that of frequent Communion,<sup>3</sup> as the reception of the Sacraments was at the time a rare occurrence, St. Teresa herself, some years subsequently in Spain, finding difficulty in obtaining permission for Communion but once in two weeks. For the time being, Angela's share in so large a confraternity, with definite duties to the living and the dead, satisfied her longing for spiritual anchorage, and in her Franciscan habit and cord she rejoiced to go about, with the importance of youth, singing and making melody in her heart. The association placed her in certain matters in subjection to a superior and enjoined upon her to dress plainly, without ornament, to abstain from revels, dances, and masques, a prescription which, it is interesting to note, occurs in her own primitive Rule,<sup>4</sup> for masques and mountebanks were forms of diversion dear to the native Brescian heart; there, among the dancing, grimacing

<sup>2</sup> Pastor, *History of the Popes*, Vol. V, p. 29, quoting Reumont.

<sup>3</sup> Bull of Pius VII, 1807.

<sup>4</sup> Rule, Chap. III, *Of Intercourse with the World*.



shepherds of the Brescian valleys, actually did originate in earlier ages the famous Harlequin of the mediaeval stage, — the children's darling, — Arlecchino, King of Burlesque, lineal descendant of the Erl-King of mediaeval poetry, who was said to govern the mountain sprites and gnomes. And the sly, dancing Brighetta of the Brescian province, was considered to have been the traditional mother of all Marionettes of the world,<sup>5</sup> and often had Angela laughed at her tricks! Every Brescian made a good buffoon. In fact, from an old law it is clear,<sup>6</sup> that Buffoons had a Guild of their own and received from the Brescian commune permission to celebrate the feast-days of the Church. Imagination at once gloats over those unique religious festas, half devotional and all rollicking mirth. It was not in France alone then that Our Lady had her Tumbler.

Merriment breaks up the hard shackles of life. It is proverbially those who lead the hardest life that can laugh the best. In Angela's blood, then, ran the spirit of the old buffoons. Perhaps it was her racial inheritance of this that enabled her to say to the pangs of hunger, be still! while she sat and listened to some long-drawn-out tale, or galloped over the hills on an errand of charity of a windy day, with a few chestnuts, as provisions, in her pocket. Angela schooled herself to laugh at the demands of her own nature, yet lively people liked her, and children and young girls adored her.

From the time she became a Tertiary of St. Francis, Angela began to practice voluntary poverty. We have now to picture to ourselves the life of austere labor which she and her friend took up in the old farm-house; here was the same fireplace where she had once tried vainly to destroy her hair; now, at twenty-two, its masses lay in pale gold beneath her simple veil, outlining a paler cheek, while her slight figure told its own tale. Still the vivacity was there, whose sparkle often accompanies austerity like a nimbus. She came of a race that was full of fun, and to old age retained the brightness of her manner as old biographies tell.

<sup>5</sup> Rosa, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>6</sup> Odorici, *Storie Bresciane dai primi tempi*, VIII, 36: "Quod omnes mezzadri et incantatores teneant celebrari." This work of Odorici in nine volumes is a historical source of first rank, drawing from municipal diplomatic archives as well as ancient chroniclers. Its chief value is for pre-Renaissance times. It is good to know that the present administration of the Queriniana in Brescia contemplate the issue of some of its treasured Brescian MSS. hitherto unedited.



Although she despoiled herself of her patrimony <sup>7</sup> in order to live upon alms, she did not as yet abandon her father's house, apparently, as there seems to be no tradition of her having ever lived elsewhere during the years that now elapsed.

Angela dressed quite plainly. The age was marked by domestic extravagance among rich and poor. Desperate attempts had been thrown out repeatedly by podestas and councils to restrict the price which a lady might spend upon dresses and jewels, while the lavish expenditure even for a bed chamber was the scandal of the day. When Angela was a toddling child, the Grand Pragmatica <sup>8</sup> was passed for the Brescian territories, a law of sixteen points to the effect that women might not have more than one silk dress,<sup>9</sup> and the like painstaking restrictions. The poor, especially, were not to wear expensive materials; lavish refreshments might not be served; and if there were at table more than four besides the family the meal was considered a banquet, and fell under civic surveillance.<sup>10</sup> "Could a woman wearing these sleeves," grumbled Sacchetti in his *Novellette*, "lift a glass or anything else from the table without soiling both sleeves and tablecloth with the tumblers they upset?"

All her biographers assert that Angela's leadership made itself felt, so that while the Gentile raged, and the smiling age with a shrug moved on, it proved, along certain circles on the Riviera, matter of some moment when a girl, notable in her vicinity as she was, took stand against the tide and dressed plainly.

## II

Haven of peace as might have been the household of young Donna Merici at that time, from her doorstep you turned out into the high road to turmoil and danger, for the fiercest throes of political strife beset the Brescian provinces during her lifetime. The

<sup>7</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Cassa: *Funerali pompe e conviti*, reviewed by Zanelli in *Arch. Stor. Veneto*, 1889, p. 429.

<sup>9</sup> But while Venice and Florence went on producing Sumptuary Laws from 1500-1714, Milan, more wise, had learned that the vitality of her commerce depended largely upon gold, silver, and silk. See Verga, *Sumptuary Laws*.

<sup>10</sup> Biagi: *Private Life of Florentines*, p. 105.

Riviera along Lake Garda, as well as the three valleys that met at Brescia, to wit, Valcamonica, Val Trompia and Val Sabbia, formed the point of entrance and egress for the great rabble of foreign soldiery that streamed over the Alps into Italy during the period of the Italian wars. All down the valley and the lake, castello after castello, grim and beetling, with thick walls and massive iron-barred entrance, kept watch. The reports of the day and the records of town councils are full of desperate calls for soldiers to guard the passes from town to town. However, people living from generation to generation under the frown of the besieger become adepts at war and learn how to keep the even tenor of their own existence; so now the little villages dotting the plains had their castles well garrisoned while everyday life went on as usual. A man's crops were never quite his own, and any town at any moment might stand fire of battering rams, all the while the industrious villager had his flax a-weaving, or his silks in the loom, or sat at his bench working away at his leather. But faring along the highways was certainly unsafe, especially for women.

Angela, however, knew these roads well by land and water, and she and her companion contrived to find their way open. She knew her native hills, and she knew her lake. They went on with their work together, while the poor of the neighborhood and the sick were not slow to discover that these two were more than ready to spend themselves in kindness. Little ones from Desenzano and the surrounding farms came to lisp the catechism to her and her friend and to hear the charming stories of the Bambino, the Madonna, and the saints.

But once more the mysterious angel of death stepped across her path, and her beloved companion died.

"As the dark shadow of this new affliction closed around her," writes one biographer, "the tried girl, had her soul not been taught to read the Divine counsels in a supernatural light, might have been tempted to think that her love and trust seemed to blight and kill every one that was dear to her."<sup>11</sup> Her spiritual directors could not but see that Providence had some extraordinary designs upon Angela Merici. Had she been in the least degree an aggressive character, one of those brilliant, daring souls who, illumined by

<sup>11</sup> O'Reilly, *History of St. A. Merici*.

Divine vocation, have started off from the ordinary path and with courage and originality characteristic of such temperaments have opened up new lines of sanctity in the Church's life, leaving a resplendent highway behind them, . . . had she been of this type, the Providential course of her experience might have been easier to forecast. But she was not.

She was not inclined to leave the world. Many girls a dozen years younger had entered convents, but Angela showed no inclination to the monastic life. Mere little girls in their teens had become wives and mothers and at her age were tasting domestic responsibilities, yet Angela lingered on. A few women throughout Italy lived isolated lives, devotees of prayer, well-known and revered, still she could hardly have deliberately purposed to be one of these. No, with the restlessness of youth in her veins, the natural buoyant faith in life's possibilities, it must have been a peculiar suffering to her that God, and no one but God, had cut off one by one the ties that bound her to normal life, yet vouchsafed no light by which she might divine her way. "What was she going to do?" asked her friends; and in the solitude of her nightly vigils, she turned to her Maker with the question "What am I to do?" To some natures, waiting carries with it a peculiar torture. If Angela Merici was of such a sort, the fiber of her being was tempered by a process that was surely long drawn out. War brought misery and sickness to the country-side, and gave her much to do: but as the days passed and she came home at night to her lonely pillow in the old creaking farm-house, there was ever in her spiritual existence a groping, of which the death of her friend had made her keenly conscious.

### III

It was at this point in her life that one of those singular experiences occurred, which so often mark the lives of the saints and form a great mystical turning point.<sup>12</sup> Francis had his dream of Lady Poverty, poor Jeanne d'Arc, her Voices, while to Angela Merici came the lovely vision of Brudazzo. Who can fittingly relate these delicate, evanescent flashes of the mystical experience?

One day in harvest time, Angela was going with some other young

<sup>12</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

girls along the road that skirts Lake Garda between Desenzano and Salò, perhaps to see the harvesting, perhaps on some errand of kindness, when she happened to stray a little away from the others who had stopped to take their luncheon, and withdrew behind the vines out of sight. The spot was called Brudazzo. There hidden by the leaves she knelt down to pray. The uncertainties of the future oppressed her, and with yearning she implored God that He would deign to show her the way to find a happy end and direct her wavering steps. Nothing was clear to her mind. She did not know what was to become of her. With prayers full of sighs the poor girl began to weep. Never had she felt so lonely.

Suddenly a heavenly light immersed her, flooding her soul with ecstasy. And she saw distinctly, stretching from the spot where she was kneeling, a luminous ladder, reaching to the skies, up which were moving a throng of maidens in noble apparel, each with a royal diadem. And there was music: they were singing with surpassing melody, sacred songs, concerted with musical instruments harmoniously touched by a throng of angels, angels and maidens commingling in resplendent order and beauty. Angela remained in a transport of joy scarcely daring to breathe. And among all these she beheld the dear friend of whom she had been so lately bereft. That sweet familiar form leaned out to speak to the lonely girl:

"Angela," she said, "Angela, know that God has shown you this vision to signify that before you die, you are to found, in Brescia, a company like these virgins."

Other mysterious things were also made known to her.<sup>13</sup> Then the radiant cortège moved on upward and disappeared. This incident in Angela's life demands attention.

Some critics consider the source material insufficient to evidence the facts of this event satisfactorily. For instance, one of them<sup>14</sup> finds in the story of the ladder a species of allegory showing the sudden spiritual illumination of Angela's mind, during which, with prophetic foresight, she beheld women going through life in guise of ministering angels. Yet tradition has always invested the experience

<sup>13</sup> Girelli: she says she repeats it in the words of P. Landini. "His account seems to me the worthiest of consideration, as he was one of the first to gather from authentic sources facts concerning the life of Angela."

<sup>14</sup> M. Vincentia, *Neusee, Die Heilige A. Merici*, p. 30.



in a clothing of objective reality, a real ladder, perceived by the senses.<sup>15</sup> The early historians somewhere assert that Angela could even repeat the melody she heard. Upon investigation, M. Vincentia decides that instead of its being a supernatural vision of objective reality it was more likely a supernatural vision of subjective reality, and that there actually was no ladder.<sup>16</sup>

But Angela's vision at Brudazzo is interwoven with all the traditions concerning her; passing over the question of its character, it

<sup>15</sup> Poulain discusses this matter clearly in *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, tr. by Smith, from 6th ed., 1910:

#### DESCRIPTION OF INTELLECTUAL VISION

"St. Teresa, describing a similar experience, and speaking of herself in the third person says: 'She sees nothing either outwardly or inwardly, . . . but without seeing anything she understands what it is, more clearly than if she saw it. . . . She is like a person who feels that another is close beside her: but because she is in the dark she sees him not . . . without a word inward or outward the soul clearly perceives . . . why or how, she knows not.' Relation VII, 26, from Alvarez: *Life*, p. 454, in Poulain, 318.

'Multitudes of angels seemed to me to be above the canopies of the stall . . . but I saw no bodily forms, for the vision was intellectual.' Relation III, 16, *Life*, p. 429, quoted by Poulain, 318.

"St. Teresa had intellectual visions of the sacred Humanity before she had imaginative visions. This may cause surprise, for intellectual visions are of a higher order. But on the other hand they are less distinct. There has been progress therefore in the sense of distinctness. What confirms this idea is that the same process of gradual development was followed in the case of St. Teresa's imaginative visions. First she saw only Our Lord's hands, then His face, and finally the whole body." See *Life*, Chap. XXVIII, in Poulain, 310.

"With regard to the certainty of such visions, St. Teresa says: 'The soul, for some time afterwards, possesses such certainty that this grace comes from God that whatever people may say to the contrary it cannot fear a delusion. Later on, when her confessor suggests doubts to her, God may allow such a person to waver in her belief for a time and to feel misgivings lest in punishment for her sins she may possibly have been allowed to go astray. However, she does not give way to these apprehensions.' *Interior Castle*, 6th Mansion, Chap. 81, quoted by Poulain, 311.

"The soul to whom God grants this vision almost always falls into an ecstasy, nature being too weak to bear so dread a sight. I say dread, although this apparition is more lovely and delightful than anything that could be imagined, even though one lived a thousand years and spent all that time in trying to picture it. . . . Yet the presence of such surpassing majesty inspires the soul with great fear.' *Idem*, Chap. 3, in Poulain, 312.

"St. John of the Cross says: 'The effects of these imaginative visions on the soul are quietness, enlightenment, joy and sweetness, pureness, love, humility, inclination or elevation of the mind to God, sometimes more of one, sometimes more of another . . . those of Satan result in dryness of spirit, tendency to self esteem, and in no degree . . . love of God.'" *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, Chap. XXIV, p. 171-172; Poulain, 312.

<sup>16</sup> Neusee, *op. cit.*, p. 35.



cannot be ignored. In absence of sworn testimony, Landini used it twenty-six years after her death, and the Processo Nazari contains nothing contradictory to it; it has certainly been the favorite subject for artists, and finally, it was respected in the Papal Bull of Canonization.

However, what peculiarly concerns us here is the effect of the incident upon her subsequent life.

It is remarked of all such mystic experiences in the lives of saintly leaders, that time never effaces the impression. It is more real than the world of reality around them. And so with Angela. The vivid image did not disappear, as Salvatori goes on to say in his relation, nor did the celestial music cease to resound in her ears, but she went repeating it to herself over and over again, with most sweet melody. But above all, the Divine command remained engraved in her heart, . . . "rimasce in cuore scolpito il divino comando," and she began her long years of meditation as to how it should be carried out. And, moreover, Salvatori relates, "as it had been included in the revelation, either by some particular instruction, or by intimate mental illumination, that the company of whom she was destined to be the mother should be specially consecrated to the education and spiritual advantage of her neighbor, she began to consider how to do this with her allotment of strength and opportunity."<sup>17</sup>

Nothing in her whole experience played such a positive part in her life as this subtle, intangible episode, known as the Vision of Brudazzo. No matter whether or not one accepts or scoffs at what savants call the laws of mysticism, the measure of a man's professed intercourse with the world of the unseen is proven by its influence upon his living act. In the gradual unfolding of this woman's life is shown very curiously the power of suggestion exerted by this event of her girlhood. At the time it happened both inheritance and environment had shaped her to receive a new impetus, ready, and there is no doubt at all that from this inspiration arose her life-work, her new and very original teaching-idea.

She understood now: her lot was not for the cloister, nor was she to be in any sense a recluse: she was to gather together a band

<sup>17</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 17.



VISION OF BRUDAZZO, PAINTING BY CALCINARDI



of women for some special purpose, and it was to be done in the city of Brescia. Even should she wait a thousand years the light that had once shone would not fail. To this significant moment, then, the lines of all her previous life had led up consistently. That intellectual avidity so early displayed, the instinctive spirit of self-sacrifice, the austere chasteness for which she had battled against the legions of darkness, the personal magnetism and natural leadership, and finally that breadth of intercourse in which she had been brought up, so characteristic of the Italian Renaissance, were suddenly, in the light of this event, charged with meaning and a Providential reason. Nor did it now seem without design, furthermore, that people had learned to respect her personality and to single her out from her babyhood.

Many of the saint-founders had to pass through long years of mistrust and opposition, and this was their ordeal by fire, but hers was to be of another kind. In this familiar atmosphere, this lovely region dotted with villages along Lake Garda, she could, at least for the present, go on working among the young people in her accustomed way, content.

Providence had further provided most signally that every domestic tie which might have hampered her was early broken, before she herself had as yet lost the charm and freshness that made her young womanhood attractive to the girls of her acquaintance. Out of sorrow, then, out of suffering and combat, doubt and darkness, Angela Merici suddenly stepped to something like a secure outlook upon life. The relief must have been incalculable. Some biographers assert that she told her vision to her companions on that sunny day at Brudazzo, girl-like, with the sane impulse to share with them the splendid new secret in her heart. One can imagine the warm young nature of her, fired with the spiritual beauty, the new spiritual truth of the moment, after the long chill of bereavement in which her youth had been icebound! Painters have not been slow to perceive the lovely significance of this cardinal point in her life, and in consequence, of all the subjects immortalizing this genius of Lake Garda, none has been so popular, nor has given rise to conceptions of such spiritual beauty as the vision of Brudazzo.

## IV

Naturally, the girl would react strongly to so powerful an impression. As days and weeks passed by, her energies would have found new zest, if only in the immediate tasks at hand. Bewilderment would soon resolve itself into the steadiness of purpose of one who has a definite aim in life.

"Leaving Desenzano," says the Bull of Canonization,<sup>18</sup> "she went to many other places to fulfill pious offices towards her neighbor." In the light of contemporary history her kindly offices are not difficult to define, for the chronicles of the latter half of the fifteenth century are full of accounts of storms, failures of crops, scarcities, inundations, earthquakes and plagues. Infectious diseases, regardless of distinction, called in common speech the Plague, "La Moria," were in consequence of Italy's accessibility from the Orient, constantly smouldering in one place or another, ready to break out anew. Even healthy places were not exempt, the rough soldiery of the ceaseless stream of invaders carrying germs as they moved along. A passage in a letter from Luther when he was on his way to Rome on business for his Order,<sup>19</sup> gives an idea what young women like Donna Merici could do among the sick, for the long death-roll in the chronicles, with the laments of men who lived through these days when she was working at Desenzano, afford little doubt as to the appalling extent of sickness:

"Excellent food and drink," he declared, "careful attendants and learned physicians they have. Beds and bedding are clean and the walls are covered with paintings. When a patient is brought in, his clothes are removed, a white smock is put on him, he is laid in a comfortable bed with clean linen. Many ladies take it in turn to visit the hospitals and tend the sick, keeping their faces veiled so that no one knows who they are. Each remains a few days and then returns home, another taking her place."<sup>20</sup>

The picturesque Brothers of the Italian Confraternities must have known Angela well. Often at a street-corner was she startled

<sup>18</sup> Pius VII, Bull of Canonization, in *Spirit of Angela*.

<sup>19</sup> In 1511.

<sup>20</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 66-67, quoting Forstemann.



anew by these mysterious, sombre-clad men, carrying a funeral bier in silence, their rosaries tinkling faintly as they walked, the face perhaps of a prince or some other illustrious citizen shrouded in the great hood: men who deemed it a privilege thus to fulfill the corporal Works of Mercy,<sup>21</sup> while every passer-by stopping bared his head with respect as King Death and his cortège moved along; these brethren of hers in charity were perhaps burying the very poor man unto whom she herself had, a few days before, carried alms.

But it is very conceivable how her deepest thoughts were upon the children, the little girls. She had begun to seek them out more especially as who should say "I am for you and you are for me." Wherever there was a little waif or stray, a motherless child, a forlorn little street girl, sad young eyes looked up and beheld a new friend. Had she not heard it, the call within her inmost soul, the summons to do something for these? It was like an echo of those solemn words from the Cross: "Woman, behold thy son; Son, behold thy Mother!" Not a day passed now, but Angela was thinking, thinking, wondering what it was that was given her to do.

There was not far away another great leader whose thoughts were upon the children. This was Savonarola, in the city of Florence.<sup>22</sup> Just before the death of John Merici, when Angela was a girl in her teens, Savonarola had spent three years preaching through the Lombard towns. The Dominican's strong face and burning words had created a great stir in those days and the Lombard hills were still reëchoing his impassioned prophecies.

Throughout all northern Italy Savonarola's influence had spread. At the present moment he had been recalled from the missionary field to the pulpit of San Marco in Florence, but the talk of his sermons, his opinions, his reforms, was everywhere. He was like a beacon on a hill. To his mind the present generation was a despair but his hopes for the future were centered in the children. His spirit and Angela's were trumpets of kindred tone. Again and again he had warned parents of the snares besetting their little ones: the licentious decorations in private houses and public palaces,

<sup>21</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 59, 60.

<sup>22</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 181; also Villari, *Life and Times of Savonarola*; also Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 279.

suggesting evil to the young mind; the musk and perfume, gauds and frippery that dazzled the senses and blinded the children's souls; the loose and ribald songs sung at the carnival for girls and boys to hear and admire; the pagan teachers and professors with their pagan books. So at last he set to work practically. He gave a series of sermons to the children themselves and they all came flocking. He told them to choose for their heroes the saints and martyrs rather than the ancients in Plutarch's fashionable book: to study Latin Grammar in the writings of St. Jerome and St. Leo, rather than in Tibullus, and Catullus and Ovid. He preached charity to the young people and urged them to diligence at their studies. He stimulated their interest in the welfare of their country. Five thousand boys and many girls took part in the Palm Sunday procession that year.

During the days of carnival in Florence the children even went from house to house and gathered dice, cards, lutes, and song books, cosmetics, indecent pictures and carnival masks, false hair and <sup>23</sup> bad books, with which they created immense bonfires in the streets of Florence. The influence of these young zealots was tremendous. He used these boys to bring the indecencies of the Florentine carnival into disrepute; very dramatically, he had them form into procession after mass and communion, when amid pealing of palace-bells and snarling of the long trumpets they ranged in the Loggia, singing invectives against the carnival. The King of Carnival was then and there burned on a funeral pyre, and on they went, on down the street, chanting hymns and lauds, four young lads costumed as angels bearing aloft a beautiful figure of the Child Jesus carved by Donatello, and meantime, along the way as they went, alms were collected on silver trays from the crowds in the streets.<sup>24</sup> Then Savonarola turned to the parents, imploring salutary reforms in domestic education: "Go into all the schools in Florence," he shouted, his eyes flashing, "you will find professors paid to teach Logic and Philosophy and all the arts and sciences, but not one to teach Holy Scripture!" <sup>25</sup> And the words of the great preacher were

<sup>23</sup> Villari, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 418.

<sup>24</sup> Villari, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 133, 134.

<sup>25</sup> Sermon 3rd Monday in Lent. Cf. Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

carried the length and breadth of the land. Savonarola was an extremist.<sup>26</sup> His efforts were too theatrical even for the sensuous Florentines, too arrogant, not to prove ephemeral; beside him, Angela Merici, whose austerities were beyond understanding, seems preëminently healthy and sane.

It was his work with the children that attracted her attention. When therefore, to her lifelong yearning to do some definite good, was added the impulse of the Brudazzo experience, the revelation that she was to establish a group of young girls to move like ministering angels through the world, the proceedings in Florence and Savonarola's words to the children must have taken on a double interest to her mind. Yes, it was true. The children could regenerate the world. And if the white-robed boys of San Marco, Savonarola's beloved "angels," were to accomplish such wonders, what of the mild-eyed little girls of the Lombard valleys, the future mothers of the Italian people?

Thus did her teaching-idea vaguely stir to life,—a large conception, broad, full of undefined possibilities.

## V

And almost without her seeking it, there gathered in the home at Desenzano a group of fellow workers, a sort of spiritual élite, in an unassuming apostolate. The young women of her acquaintance, daughters of people she had known from infancy, coming from Lonato, from Salò, from Sirmione, even from Lazise across the lake, delighted to assist her. There was as yet nothing organized about their work, no mention in authentic history of Angela's having opened a school during her stay in Desenzano any more than during the long years at Brescia. Nor was she in her parents' home the superior in any sense of a community of women. She occupied

<sup>26</sup> Villari gives him credit for the good turn he gave the children's minds, see Villari, II, 133. But Burckhardt does not praise his attacks upon the carnival. He points out that the Frate's parties of boys were unpopular among the Florentines, and that they were often beaten by the housewives whose doors they forced, searching for finery; see Burckhardt, II, 279. Villari calls attention to the fact that the old historians pass over the carnival instance in silence; and that moderns either praise or sneer, with much exaggeration on either side.

herself with whatever work came to hand, relying upon Providence to fulfill its own definite designs.

They brought the children in, wherever these could be found, neglected waifs, and taught them to lisp the Catechism and the prayers, and the Gospel of St. John and certain of the Mass Collects. Then she instructed the little girls how they should obey their parents, not sitting down when father is present unless he bid them;<sup>27</sup> they should be silent in presence of their elders, bowing their heads and answering with modesty. Night and morn when they received their parents' blessing they should kiss the hand that blessed them. When other children were naughty they should go away and leave them.

In Catechism, — judging from the same source, — she would have taught them the Commandments, the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, the Deadly Sins, the way of salvation and the doctrine of the life to come. Then, perhaps, afterwards, they would be taught hymns, — all adjourning to the green grass in the shade, where like the Florentine children,<sup>28</sup> they could weave their garlands of olive leaves, singing from group to group the pretty hymns so popular in that day; hymns which they heard many a time in the guild processions, when they, too, pattered along, lighted tapers in hand, following the picture of the Madonna. It was during these quiet years at the old Merici homestead, alone with her young friends, that Angela met with her best opportunities for studying children, and for vaguely fitting these little girls into her dreams of the future. Her lively disposition found much to enjoy in their young ideas.

Talented little girls, they, music and dance tingling in their blood; so Angela found their gayety expressed in song and dance whimsically woven around the ancient strifes and dangers of their ancestors. Who among them all had not danced the monfrine on Sant'-Alessandro's Day, to the pipes and horns of the Brescian pifferari?

<sup>27</sup> Such is the conception of family life as the basic unit of society that Rösler outlines as taught to children by Christian parents in that day. See Rösler, *Dominicis Erziehungslehre und die Padagogischen Italiens im 15 Jahrhundert*.

<sup>28</sup> Aeneas Sylvius says: "I may assume from your Christian nurture that you have learned the Lord's Prayer, the Salutation of the Blessed Virgin, the Creed, the Gospel of St. John and certain Collects." See *Source Book of the Renaissance*; also Pastor, V, 25-35.



As a happy lull between the stories of Daniel and that of the boys whom the bears devoured for running after the prophet, the children, one set as policemen (Christians), the other as robbers, (Saracens), made incursions from the malefactors' base,<sup>29</sup> chanting,

*"Rompe, romþ, derandera, derandera,  
Pecatora, pecatora, . . . Bring on another victim!"*

and, tiring of this, they would merrily break into an old ring-dance<sup>30</sup> to the lilt of the ancient song,

*"O dansa bela dansa,  
Chi fa la dansa tora!"* (Here they turn.)

If they had not already learned at school, Angela helped them read; perhaps, like wise old St. Jerome, she plunged them into the difficult genealogy of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph for a drill in learning to pronounce hard words.<sup>31</sup> And then perhaps some morning, they would come bursting in to tell teacher about the marvellous Mystery Play they had seen day before in the Piazza; Abraham and Isaac, with a real bundle of faggots and a real ram, a little refractory, as is the way of rams, and real painted angels with rosy faces hanging mysteriously in air. So inevitably does history repeat itself, that in this world of ours, there is practically always the very same teacher and the very same child!

## VI

Time-honored as were the methods of teaching which she employed, Angela, like Dominici, who predicted it, felt the turn of a tide; she was, even at that time, dimly aware of the coming moral reaction in women's lives, hitherto hedged around with such restraints. It was beginning to dawn upon her that if she were really going to train young women, she must be ready to send them hither and thither down the thoroughfares instead of placing them behind

<sup>29</sup> The Saracens used to make depredations from the fastnesses of Monte Gargano as far back as the year 890. Rosa traces this game to that fact.

<sup>30</sup> Rosa, *op. cit.*, pp. 300, 303.

<sup>31</sup> St. Jerome, *Lettres*; Vol. V, 98; III, 57; Paris, 1837.



the grille of the convent; otherwise, they would never find the work destined for them to do. When she reached this conclusion it was the first definite step in her Teaching Idea; it phrased itself thus, — that she must have no cloister. She knew very well that not half had been done for girls that had been already done for the boys. The Italian burghers were conservative here; and conservative Brescia, always under the influence of Venice which was a traditional stronghold of Orientalism, was slow in accepting the theory of sex-equality which the Renaissance was bringing in. Wherever the new ideas prevailed an onward impetus was at work. Angela scented change.

The battle of the classics then raging between the pagan and Christian schools of Humanists spent its bitterest shafts upon women. Savonarola insisted that “even the best of the heathen poets should be studied by women only after a strong and healthy Christian training.” The feminine ideal that was slowly dawning upon Italy is still admirable in our own day.

“The refinement of her taste,” said Raphael’s friend, “will show in her dress, always becoming, which, grave or gay, will never be too flippant, and in the grace and dignity of all her movements; and she must care for her household and her children, retaining all the charm of her womanly ways.” In his opinion she should know enough science and art to form an intelligent judgment.<sup>32</sup>

But the rage for the classics in fashionable circles interested Angela not a whit. To be sure, her mind caught the freshness of vision inherent in the age, none better, but this focussed itself elsewhere. Child of a happy Christian home, forced early into an abnormal isolation, it was but natural that she should look about her and notice how the ills that were creeping in among the people were such as had been unknown to her own family circle. Where was now the Christian instruction that should be fortifying the character of the young? What she was thinking about was the home, the family, the need of Christian principle. False ideas arose from lack of true ideas and no one was more disposed to sacrifice herself for these if only she knew just how or what to do.

<sup>32</sup> Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano*. “Men moulded by the hands of Italian ladies could be distinguished among a thousand; they could talk about anything and everything.” R. de Maulde la Claviere: *Women of the Renaissance*.

For she could have told you in her own simple fashion, something of the superstition prevalent among her neighbors and the age she lived in. And especially could she have regaled you with story upon story about the witch lore of Valcamonica, for curiously enough, and greatly to the point, the principal places actually affected by this sorcery movement were those very districts about Brescia, and the lands near Como and Lake Maggiore, and the popular resorts for demon-worship were Valcamonica in her own native province.<sup>33</sup>

No one better than Angela appreciated the venom of their practices, and no one longed more to counteract them. She gradually came to fix her heart upon carrying to these young people the Christian instruction which was the antidote. Little girls ought not believe in witches and necromancy, so thought she. There was plenty to be had of the true and the beautiful to feed young imaginations, in the lore of Him who bade the little ones come unto Him. This train of thought led to her second definite conclusion, namely, that the most important need of all was the teaching of right Christian principles. There was no lack of schools as yet, but there were not enough of them, and teachers, full of the new learning, were neglecting Christian doctrine and Christian character. Her attention was now drawn to what was being done around her in Italy, all that had been done in the past, anywhere, for girls, for their education. But what was she to do? and how was she to do it? These were the absorbing queries.

## VII

Notwithstanding what the New Learning had in store for the daughters of patrician families, the mothers of the Brescian district when not too poor were still, in mediaeval fashion, consigning their little girls for a year or two in their teens to the care of the nuns in the convents. Especially in time of war and political disturbance was such the case. During the siege of Brescia a few years later

<sup>33</sup> Fumi, *L'Inquisizione e lo Stato di Milano*, in *Arch. Stor. Lombardo*, 1910: also D. Alessandro Sina, *San Carlo in Valle Camonica*, in *Brixia Sacra*, July-Sept., 1910: the latter describes conditions in Val Camonica at the time of Angela as "a fatal decadence in Christian life"; but he shows that under St. Charles' direction, the whole valley awoke to life. St. Charles said: "non aver fatto mai visita con maggiore soddisfazione di questa."

there was a mad rush for the convents.<sup>34</sup> And with small wonder, for even in times of peace a girl going to mass could be stolen from under her mother's wing in the public streets of Venice and whisked off in a gondola! <sup>35</sup> No Venetian daughter of the upper class would presume to appear in public without the long white veil covering her face and bosom. Patrician girls were not often seen abroad in Venice; even church going was not customary for them since all patrician homes had their own chapels. In the convents protection was assured.

In such wise was St. Teresa of Avila brought up in Spain. "They took me to a monastery, — Augustinian," she writes, "in the city where I lived, and in which children like myself were brought up. I remained for a year and a half and was very much better for it." <sup>36</sup>

This then was the extent of the convent term even in a wealthy family; what of the poor? Some years later, receiving her ten-year-old niece, Teresita, just then returned from Peru where her father had amassed a fortune, she gives glimpses of the life of such girls within the monastery walls: "One of the most learned theologians has been consulted in Teresita's case, and he says that among the decisions of the Congregation of Cardinals (the Council of Trent) <sup>37</sup> it has been laid down that the habit cannot be given to a girl under twelve, but she can be brought up in the convent. Teresita is already here wearing her own dress, and the sprite of the house! She knows how to amuse us at recreation, telling about the Indians and about the sea-voyage better than I could! "

Angela's contemporaries among the Italian girls presented an equally lively picture. What they could learn there Angela knew very well; in the language of Robert Aske, who petitioned Henry VIII against the outrageous dissolution of the monasteries: "Gentlemen's children there do live to the number sometimes of thirty,

<sup>34</sup> See Odorici, *op. cit.*

<sup>35</sup> Sanuto, March 1487, during Angela's girlhood, records the daughter of Zuan di Riviera going to mass with her mother, snatched by Francesco Zucati di Sier Pollo, put in a boat by force and carried off; he, to be fined 3000 l, living or dead, by the Avogadori of the Commune. See Molmenti, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Pt. II, 178.

<sup>36</sup> *Autobiography of St. Teresa*, Chap. II, N. Y. 1911.

<sup>37</sup> *Cartas de Santa Teresa de Jesus*, Carta XXXVI, "y sabe entretener bien en las recreaciones contando de los indios y de la mar."

forty, and more, right virtuously brought up"; and, adds a contemporary, "the young maids learn needlework, the art of confectionery, surgery (for anciently there were no apothecaries or surgeons; the gentlewomen did cure their poor neighbors: their hands are now too fine); physic, writing and drawing, a fine way of breeding up young women."<sup>38</sup>

Nobody knew and loved the traditions of monastic education better than did Angela; the Brescian statute books of preceding centuries were full of solicitude for the well-being of the nuns in her own city, who, from time immemorial had fitted their young women to take an intelligent part in domestic and social life.<sup>39</sup>

It was not in Angela to forget any of this. Those years that quietly lapsed after the Vision of Brudazzo were years of deep meditation on her part. It was the season of germination; and rightly to evaluate the history of her mind, we must realize what there was in the past to form her familiar retrospect, beyond the actual environment in which she lived.

## VIII

One by one all the educational links of the past presented themselves before her memory. Through reading the Christian Fathers, long her favorite employment, she knew that early in the Christian era they had set about the training of little girls. The work had begun ages before; in fact, the Christian ideal of girls' education was drawn out by a master pen in the days when the twinkling tapers of the catacombs had but recently given way before the intellectual torch of an Augustine, a Basil. It is to no less a luminary than the great Saint Jerome that posterity owes this debt. After gazing upon the pallid, emaciated old anchoret painted by Domenichino in — "The Last Communion of St. Jerome" — stark, despoiled of human things, one turns with surprise to the warm blooded, sane and wholesome character awaiting us in living line

<sup>38</sup> Gasquet, *Henry VIII and the English Monasteries*, II, 223.

<sup>39</sup> The mediaeval poems, *The Cid*, the *Chanson de Roland*, and the ballads show this feminine type, to whom virtue alone is the pearl of price; the social type of woman depicted in the chronicles of Froissart, Monstrelet, Philip de Commines vie with the great Saxon, French, German, and Italian saints.



behind the letters which the man once wrote. And not the least of the surprise is to find how interested that austere follower of Christ Crucified was in the little girls, children of noble families, personal friends of his in Rome.

No modern pedagogue has gone to more pains in specifying the details of early mental training than did this grave Doctor of the Church, in his fifty-seventh Letter, concerning the education of little Paula.<sup>40</sup> "Provide the child with letters made of wood or ivory, each with its name on it, to serve as playthings, and as instruction. Nor is it enough that she know the order of the letters, nor that she can say them by heart, sing-song; you must often mix them up, put the last in the middle, the middle ones at the beginning, so she can tell them not only by name but by appearance. When the time comes for her to begin to trace the stylus on the wax with trembling fingers, you must either have another hand guide hers holding fast, or else you must print the letters on a tablet so she can follow your lines and not go astray. Encourage her by little presents that charm children of her age. Do not give her too much to do (*gourmander*), if you find her slow in grasping, but encourage her so she will rejoice in succeeding or be mortified in being surpassed. Watch specially lest she take a dislike to study, for such distaste may follow her to advanced years." . . . With such thoughtful detail does this fourth century kindergartner outline his course of training! Who shall say that the anchorets of old were half-fossilized human beings devoid of feeling, when there comes from the pen of such a man a tender, breathing passage like the following: "When your little one sees her grandfather, let her throw herself into his arms, cling to his neck, and in spite of him, sing Alleluia to him. Then her grandmother snatches her from his arms, and the little one proves how she knows him by smiling back at him. Let her be lovable to everybody, so the entire family rejoices that there is sprung from it this rose! "

One can picture Angela reading such a passage!

With regard to learning he says: "Have her taught the rhythm of Greek poetry. At the same time she should become clever in Latin, for if that language is not learned early, you get a strange

<sup>40</sup> Letter 57, Vol. 3.



accent and by vicious habits denaturalize your natal idiom. . . . Have constantly at hand the works of Cyprian and have her read, without fear of making mistakes, the letters of Athanasius and the books of Hilary. . . . If you send Paula to us, I myself will promise to serve her as teacher and nurse. I will carry her in my arms, and old as I am, I will form her very first stammerings."

Then too, no one could be prouder than Angela was of the mediaeval nuns who were celebrated for their learning and for their handicrafts, scribes, illuminators, goldsmiths, embroiderers; they fabricated parchments, inks and pigments; they worked in bronze and gold and the carving of ivory; they wrought great hangings of silk from materials brought from Constantinople, decorating with gold thread and jewels. They did fine gilt lettering on vellum and delicate marginal illustrations; vestments, altar cloths they wove, and winding sheets or shrouds of linen or silk. They mastered the art of design, and taught the ladies of the court to embroider badges and standards, and to weave tapestries.<sup>41</sup> Every convent became an art centre, every nun's cell a busy home of subtle thought, of ingenuity, of tireless endeavor. St. Teresa, herself, was a Doctor of Theology and a worker in fine embroidery: she wrote immortal letters, and she managed every kind of business man, from King Philip II of Spain to the muleteers who carried parcels for her to her various convents.

No matter into what disorders religious life had fallen in Angela's day and in her vicinity, and never, in truth, had standards been lower, no matter how little reason contemporaries had to be proud, all Brescia knew that through ten long centuries, generation after generation of saintly nuns had flourished like the almond tree, fashioning who knows how many hundreds of young lives to pre-side at winter firesides and light the homes of men.

And it was no new thought to Angela that in each of the old monasteries was centred the age's practical embodiment of public ideas familiar to us now as Social Service, with its relieving officer, its Poor Law guardians, its dispensary, its district nurse. Each monastic establishment, she knew, apart from its chief purpose to develop the spiritual life, exercised the four-fold function: study,

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Eckenstein: *Woman under Monasticism*.

education, agriculture, and philanthropy; and all these in the minds of mediaeval folk were freshly remembered, as by Angela in her day, whenever the Angelus went pealing down the valley.

So she was acquainted with the history of education as it meagrely presented itself at that time. It went without saying that her own native land, the first to receive culture, the last to relinquish it under stress of mediaeval confusion, had had the earliest of parish schools; she knew how the old Visconti statutes had protected schools in Salò for centuries, always exempting pupils from military service required for public protection. In her own day both master and pupil were exempt.<sup>42</sup>

But she was feeling keenly the blight that was slowly settling now upon her beloved people's Christian life. She knew that schools were being neglected in the Brescian valleys, and that in the towns the stress was all for a new learning that frequently ignored the eternal verities. Angela was one who could not forget the stern dictum, "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" She heard the buzz of the new pagan contradictions, she felt the new impulse to which the young world was rebounding, and vaguely her own spirit stirred in response, youth to youth.

Already things were changed. When she first taught at Desenzano in the old Merici farm-house, the prevailing ideas on the subject of education were of quite another color from those of the sedate olden days when a girl could while away an afternoon in the monastery pantry, assorting the pretty jellies she had made with her own hands. Instead of laboriously printing out homely labels she must now get her wits to work in another fashion. So thought Angela.

## IX

Meanwhile, in her ministrations to the needy, she soon learned how to find her way to the heart of many a lady of high degree, who, delighted to yield favors to such a solicitor, left her purse-strings at Donna Merici's disposal. One day she made the acquaintance of some people who had a villa across the bay at Padenghe, —

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Solitro, *op. cit.*

a noble lady of Brescia, Caterina Patengola, who with her husband, Gianbattista, their daughter, Monica, and their two young sons, the little lads, Costanzo and Gandolfo, had come down to stay a few months at Lake Garda. Caterina took a great fancy to the "Gentildonna," and there sprang up a friendship between the two women which was destined to be a turning point in the career of Angela Merici. Every spring, now, for ten years, when the Patengola family came out from Brescia they must needs have her spend a few days with them at Padenghe, — the patrimony from which this rich family of merchants had derived their name Patengola, — for thoroughly religious, they loved nothing better than her visits. At Padenghe villa there was an atmosphere of Italian high life, and the people with whom she came into contact here were of the cultured class of society, to whom her austere mien and simple garb detracted not in the least from her winning manner, but rather added distinction to the singular wisdom of her opinions.

Villa life, especially around the Lombard hills, is revealed by her contemporaries as characterized by charming social intercourse, in which were enjoyed all open-air pursuits as well as all noble achievements of poetry and thought.<sup>43</sup> Firenzuola speaks of beginning the day<sup>44</sup> in one of these villas with a stroll among the hills, while everybody talked philosophy in the popular Renaissance fashion: breakfast in the loggia at ten or eleven o'clock, and afterwards, music and song: later, perhaps in some shady spot, the recitation of a poem: evening would find a group of them at some spring where each told a tale; and finally came supper, with light conversation "of such sort that women might listen without shame, and the men might not seem to be in wine!"

A few years after the death of Angela's young companion, the Desenzano people were all excitement over the pleasure-tour of Lake Garda<sup>45</sup> taken by the Lady Isabella d'Este Gonzaga, which reveals the spirit of the Italian leisured class with whom Angela was now to come in touch.

The Lady is accompanied by a cavalcade of ladies and gentlemen,

<sup>43</sup> Burckhardt: *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Vol. II, p. 159.

<sup>44</sup> 1523 A.D.

<sup>45</sup> The account is vividly given in A. Peddrazoli, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, Dec., 1890.

pages and guards, and the bright, gay troop flit from Goito to Lonato and Sirmione.

From this point, a fleet of boats on the lake transports the party, with lutes and trumpets, and blare of gayety, and cries of "Gonzaga! Gonzaga! Isabella!" across the water to Salò, where the Princess was astonished at the happy-faced crowd awaiting her, and where in the town hall, the great tables were spread for the party, long tables groaning under enormous baskets of fancy breads, apples, pears, quantities of confetti and marzipani, pastries of all kinds, platters piled with all sorts of fish: and then, after the feast followed speech-making and compliments. So notable an event could scarcely have escaped the attention of Angela. She would have heard all about it from her Biancosi cousins, or from Donna Patengola. At Salò the Princess stopped for several days. Once, a gay crowd presented her with pomegranates and fish, making long and learned orations in her honor; but she would not have you imagine that this was the first evidence of Humanism she had met with, for at Lonato a boy of seven had addressed her in a Latin verse of oratory! At Salò all the ladies and gentlemen went to Mass and Vespers in "a Church prettier than our own at home in Mantua!" and so on, and so on. Was Angela at Mass or Vespers that day? Perhaps she herself watched the gay departure of the illustrious Princess from Salò, perhaps from some boat loitering on the water, one of the gilded gondolas in use on the lakes, with the colored awnings and floating bannerets, which always seemed to express the very throbbing of the Brescian heart.

The passing of this gorgeous cavalcade, however, was like a streak of sunlight on clouds of war. The other procession that daily wended its way along the Riviera and on up to Venice, coming out of Brescia, was of quite another nature; for these were the years of the great Italian wars. Angela knew the signals at night flashed from castello to castello all along the lake, and up the Brescian valleys, Desenzano with the rest. All summer long she saw from the hills above the town, or from the windows of the Patengola villa at Padenghe, trains of wagons, herds of animals, levies of guns and munitions, passing day and night down the streets on their way to Venice "a burden, the greatness of which



could not be expressed! ”<sup>46</sup> In December she heard the people complaining about Venetian and French troops thronging the city, seizing Brescian wine, straw and fodder, “to the amount of many ducats! ”

## X

For Brescia’s bitterest taste of war, the result of which Angela was to feel for many a long year, was when Gaston de Foix rode down upon the town in February, 1512. That proved to be the most dramatic chapter in all her history. There had once been a day when Brescians would have sustained any sharp siege in order to keep entrenched safe under Venice, but now many were inclined towards the French, more from desperation, for all Lombardy was sick of this four years of pillage. However, secret plots were hatched.

A dissension had been going on between the house of Gambara and the Avogadros. One day there was a quarrel between the two sons, in which the Gambaras with their retainers outrageously wounded the young Avogadro. The latter appealed to the French Commander, but, obtaining no redress, he went on pretense of spending eight or ten days on his estate, to the Doge of Venice, to incite him to retake Brescia again.<sup>47</sup> Venice was at the moment anxious to hold Brescia, “the darling daughter of St. Marks,” so the Council of Ten planned to send Gritti, with seven thousand soldiers, and the laborers from the estates on the hills, and the people from the villages, Desenzano, Peschiera, Lazise, Salò, while meantime, the chuckling Avogadro went back and secretly gained over many of the Brescians. Gritti came with the Venetians at dawn to the gates: the Brescians shut them out, but the Venetians crawled through an iron grating by which the refuse of the town escaped, and entered shouting “Marco! Marco! Avogadro! ” and the Avogadro party fell in with them. The French retreated to the castello, Countess Gambara, who was a French woman, with them, horses, harness, apparel left to the Venetians. Messer Gritti entered then through the gates, slaughtering the retreating French, and

<sup>46</sup> Zanelli, *La Devozione di Brescia a Venezia e il principio della sua decadenza nel secolo XVI*, *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, 1912.

<sup>47</sup> See Bayard’s *Chronicle*, Book II, Chaps. 37–38.

the first thing, Avogadro flew to the Gamba houses, and had them wrecked. Gritti battered the castello by the aid of two enormous crane machines, each carrying a hundred men.

At this point, down from Bologna rode Gaston de Foix, with Bayard and the main body of French, to the relief of Brescia, while Venice sent an army to support Gritti.<sup>48</sup> Bayard had fever and was not armed: he rode in a riding suit of black velvet. By this time, thousands of villagers had joined the townsmen against the French and they had walled up all the gates but one. The French approached the ramparts of the town and sent up trumpeters. It had rained a little: the descent to the town was somewhat slippery, so Gaston took off his shoes and marched in his socks drawn over the long hose. The Italians kept their footing better. The shout was "France! France! Bayard! Bayard!" to which the Brescians shouted "Marco! Marco!" Such a noise they made that the hackbuts could not be heard. Gritti said, "I believe they grow Bayards in France like mushrooms!" Bayard received a blow from a pike, and it broke off: the archers staunched the wound by tearing off their shirts.

The French pushed past the palace and entered the great Piazza, pell mell. Women cast from the windows huge stones and flints and boiling water. "And," adds the French Memoir, "the Venetians remained in the great square, so sound asleep, they will not awake for a hundred years."<sup>49</sup>

The French say that Nemours sent and hunted out the soldiers who were in convents and churches pillaging, and ordered all ladies to retire to their houses, and removed the dead bodies for fear of infection; but the Brescians say, quite conversely, that he gave the town up to pillage for seven days, and such atrocities were committed that they had to send the soldiers to bivouac outside the walls.<sup>50</sup> Three million écus, an enormous sum for those days, was taken, and an old chronicler remarks: "There is nothing more certain than that the taking of Brescia was the ruin of the French cause in Italy, for the soldiers gained so much plunder, that most of them (being mercenaries) went home and gave over the war."

<sup>48</sup> Bayard's *Chronicle*, Book II, Chap. XIX.

<sup>49</sup> Bayard, *op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> Odorici IX, p. 99, *op. cit.*

Then came the counting of costs. The sorrows of all these people touched Angela in those early days when the wounds were freshly bleeding. Prominent Brescian noblemen who stood high in the esteem of their compatriots were led to execution for stirring the city up against the French. Count Louis Avogadro, he who had held the Gate of the Piles so bravely during the assault, was, with his two sons, led out to stern execution; Count Martinengo, likewise. The Avogadros were patricians of Brescia, one of whom, Girolamo, noted philologist, jurist, patron of letters, had died but shortly before, mourned by all the city.

During the pillage, the only house that had been left immune was that into which they had carried Bayard, "the abode of a very rich man," so the chronicle says, "who had discreetly disappeared, leaving his wife to hide her two pretty daughters under some hay in a granary." The story of Bayard's courtesy, the knight "*sans peur et sans reproche*," was perfectly familiar to Angela Merici: how for six weeks he protected these Brescian girls, who dispelled his ennui by playing on the lute, and how upon parting, he gave them as marriage dower the two thousand ducats with which their mother, in fear and trembling, had tried to bribe this terrible French officer! <sup>51</sup>

## XI

The Patengolas came down to Lake Garda in July of 1516, and the distressing tales they had to tell made Angela's heart ache. Whether or not she had ever shared her secret with Caterina and her husband, they could not but feel her interest in their city and it was but natural now that they should point out the need of her help for the poor. Although the Riviera of Salò was a more desirable resort in Fall than in Summer, Caterina had come in July this year, eager to find rest from the harrowing scenes within the city walls. After the long siege of the city, peace had at last been signed with the French, May 22, 1516, the city to be protected from sack as long as it remained faithful to his Most Christian Majesty.<sup>52</sup> In the retirement of her country villa with the occasional companionship of her friend, Caterina could taste a little repose. She remained until November.

<sup>51</sup> Guicciardini, *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> Odorici, IX, *op. cit.*

As Angela smiled farewell down into the face of the bright boy who clung to his mother's arm, and Caterina asked for the thousandth time, "When are you coming to visit me?" they little dreamed of the imminent answer which Providence had in store. Within a few weeks, her two sons, both of them, sickened and died in the blasted city. Frantically she nursed them: wildly she clung to them, she and her husband, distracted with grief. To Angela she turned, beseeching her to come. And so to Brescia Angela went.

The city into which she followed her friends was that typical walled town which Dante, three centuries before, had named "Brescia la forte, Brescia la ferrea, Brescia lioness d'Italia!" The Castello still frowned, grimly fortified: there was the Clock Tower, and yonder the old palace of the twelfth or thirteenth century, famous as the Broletto, with the Piazza and the Duomo dating from the eleventh century, always the inevitable core of an Italian town. The dark, murder-infested quarter known as the Little City: wide avenues of recent date, criss-crossed by narrow, winding, crooked streets of cobble-stones, leading to gray old gates, five of them,<sup>53</sup> says Guiccardini: ramparts and ditches, ancient stucco houses, two and three stories high, irregular and picturesque, in faded pinks and greens and a thousand tints indefinite: strange, large chimneys: marble fountains of cupids bestriding dolphins and waters splashing in the sun! . . . Brescia was a city of fountains . . . while in every possible crevice and cranny, the luxuriant Italian vegetation crowded out into bloom; fresh, crisp chestnut trees in avenues and groves: and, beyond, over all, softly rising in blue air, the Brescian Alps, terraced with villas and purpling into valleys as they climbed away into the heights of the north.

After so many years of premeditation, what must have been the feeling with which Angela Merici entered the old city gates? The atmosphere of dread and danger was far from being cleared away; the silk looms of the town would stop while the workmen hurried to guard the walls; then came the stir of the wheels again. Down the long Street of the Coppersmiths each artisan hammered away at his trade, sword and arquebus at elbow ready at a moment's notice.

<sup>53</sup> See Guiccardini, *Storia de Italia*; also Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII.



When the Angelus ringing out from the Duomo of an evening, re-echoed from tower to tower, as far as Santa Eufemia outside the walls, women in the streets bowed their heads, and with vague alarms wondered what sunrise would bring for the children. Family feuds still broke the midnight silence with sudden cry and clang of arms; burglary, razing of houses, offences against decency were of daily, nightly occurrence, the perpetrators going sometimes singly, masked, sometimes openly and in gangs carrying dread before them. Adversaries often avenged themselves by burning down houses, setting up a conflagration in the crowded streets, where straw-thatched roofs crouched in among the massive stone palaces with embattled towers.

Little by little, with a glimpse here and an anecdote there, does the Brescia which first came under her eyes reveal itself to us. And on these streets she encountered scholar and artisan, poet and priest, soldiers, French, German, Swiss, Spaniards, Venetian, any nation, any garb: brigands and adventurers, ambassadors, peasant girls, signorinas, Jewesses, courtesans, churchmen, and preaching friars. In this very Piazza Bernardine da Feltre the Blessed had lashed the vices of the spellbound crowd; St. Bernardine had preached in San Francesco; and in one same year the seraphic Francis himself had walked these paving stones passing rapidly through Brescia, with Dominic following a few months behind. Old Malvezzi and Cavriolo both pause to chronicle the visit and tell of the juniper tree which St. Dominic planted near the Church of the Brescian martyrs.

Stubborn little town! resisting emperors and kings! showing a lineage more ancient than all their glittering titles, proud, self-contained, well aware of its own value, indifferent to all that did not concern its individual interests, yet reflecting in its depths every memorable impulse of the world around it, this Brescia, this pearl of Lombardy, secure in its setting of beauty, was not the least of the cities of Italy.

## CHAPTER THREE

### "BRESCIA, LIONESS OF ITALY"

#### I

BRESCIA was not to be merely the background for the teaching idea of Angela, not merely the local centre which forms a focus for her story, but its thought was the very fabric of her ideas, its experience shaped her life and genius into channels prearranged by Divine Providence. To understand her, and what she did, one must comprehend it. One must conceive imaginatively its trends of thought, its traditions, its civic and economic development. She thought as she did because the municipality thought as it did. The tides of mediaevalism and of renascence resolved themselves into a species of ninth wave which was to be the material basis for Angela's inspiration, under the Divinity that shapes our ends. One needs to know the matters that were agitating the little commonwealth, that had been agitating it for more than a century back; one must know how far it had progressed in the mastery of its civic and economic problems, in order to see things as she saw them and to ascertain the springs of her action.

War, then, the gripping struggle of the Empire with France, for which only one of its several stagings was Italy, formed the enveloping action of her life-drama, and against this moving cinema shifted the town's thought, the classic revival, the superstition and the magic cult of the day, with the Inquisition search-light ever upon it, the slowly dying feuds and factions of the signoria flashing out from kaleidoscopic politics, the throes of a populace in the terrors of financial ruin and starvation, and, finally, coming out of Germany, the menace of a new order of things in the rise of Protestantism. The typical color of the age was marked in the Inquisitor, and the equestrian gentleman with a Greek jest upon his lips; the magician, and the reputed witch; the assassin with scarcely con-

cealed stiletto, the starving mob, and the Swiss soldiery breaking through the incense of the Mass. All these personages, long since forgotten in their inglorious sepulchres must be brought out juridically to witness in the historical case of Angela Merici!

The greed of territorial expansion had sprung to life in the breast of Europe and the partitionment of Italy was now the dominant idea of kings. To understand just why Brescia stood at its historic climax in the period of our narrative, why Dante had once called the town “La Lionessa,” it is necessary to visualize graphically Brescia itself as a special bone of contention between Milan and Venice, and subsequently, Brescia as part of the Italian spoils for which Francis I crossed swords with the Emperor Charles V.

From the thirteenth century when Podesta Government took its rise in Italy, Brescia fared well for a matter of a hundred and fifty years. This was the municipal system existing with certain modifications in Angela’s day. The governor she knew was usually a military personage called a Podesta, chosen from some other town, as a presumably impartial arbiter for warring factions and invested with both military and civil power, responsible to the people and amenable to justice at the end of his annual term. Even at risk of mistaken confidence the city preferred his despotic sway to anarchy without him.

When the Holy Roman Empire began to decline and lose its hold upon Italy, powerful families enthroned themselves in the larger city-republics, such as Milan, Florence and Venice, so, when the Emperor John of Bohemia began to fill his coffers by actually setting up the smaller towns in the market to the highest bidder,<sup>1</sup> Brescia fell to the Visconti in Milan. Milanese sympathy and influence was traditionally strong in Brescia, but after a quarter of a century, Venice began to dispute its hold, nor did she desist in her efforts for fifty years; until when Angela was just about to make her First Communion in Desenzano, the bells in all the Campaniles were rung, to tell the people that the Venetian flag was waving from the Castello. At this moment Venice was entertaining high hopes of making herself the sovereign state of all Italy. In 1483, Pope Martin V confirmed the little town to Venice, and from that

<sup>1</sup> See Cesare Cantù *Milano*, pp. 85, 147, circ.; also Guiccardini, *Storia d'Italia*.

time on, Brescia the pearl of Lombardy, became the darling daughter of Saint Mark's, "Figluola di San Marco."

Not more than a dozen years of peaceful subjection were allotted to the Lionessa, when a new shift of affairs brought the two giants from the north to duel on the plains of Lombardy: France and Germany. Charles VIII of France began it, by dramatic descent into Italy and a rapid retreat, the first of the series that were to roll over the troubled sea of Italian politics. The chimes in the Desenzano Campanile helped to ring him out of Italy, and Angela at her teaching heard the hoofs of the soldiers' horses as they passed, but in a short while, Brescia learned with dismay that the new French King Louis XII was coming to assist partition the Venetian lands. Venice was astute enough to loosen her hold on her subject towns and to leave them to stand for themselves. She could not have made a wiser move, and Brescia gratefully stood fast to her old allegiance. French propaganda, however, built up a divided feeling within the walls. Louis XII seized Milan until, in 1512, they drove him out. The condition of the Brescian provinces at this crisis was deplorable. The soldiery were largely mercenaries, difficult to manage, and of low morale. Odorici describes them as like tigers let loose on the houses.<sup>2</sup> . . . In spite of Gaston de Foix's severe prohibition, every kind of outrage was imposed, "all sorts of torments to make the citizens yield up money. Patrician ladies, who had had their bracelets and necklaces stripped off by the hands of the rough Gascons, overwhelmed with dejection, were turned out into the silent streets, the shops emptied, the piazza deserted, good citizens made prisoners, or else fled to the strongholds of their several patrimonies or perhaps to the loneliness of the mountains." And through the suburban districts smitten with iron and fire, the people took refuge in the castellos or up fastnesses in the hills: they were not permitted to go seek their friends in the town. Those who adhered to the Emperor were at the throats of those who supported the Most Christian King.<sup>3</sup>

In this trouble Agostino Patengola was personally involved, was tried, but was not executed.<sup>4</sup> Small wonder that, under such strain,

<sup>2</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 98, 99, 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, 102.



Caterina had preferred to the shadowed old house in Brescia the peace of Padenghe Villa on the lake, with her friend, Donna Merici. And yet, to show the peculiar texture of the age, we note that this harrowing picture is set down within two years only of the smiling pleasure tour which the Princess Gonzaga had made on Lake Garda in 1514, as already described!

The luckless little city changed hands five times in seven years, until finally, May 26, 1516, she fell again <sup>5</sup> for the last time under the Republic of Venice, to whom she displayed a generous devotedness through years of economic struggle, tribulation and pitiful poverty, when the limitations upon her commerce and the impossible taxes levied by Venice, led to the brave city's final decline.<sup>6</sup> Sanuto's diary these years shows a series of statistics of moneys paid out to Venice from town and individual citizen, or else, of successive squads of soldiery passing up the Brescian highways; for no matter how occupied the Venetian government might be with mighty matters of kings, her clerk is never too busy to note down the revenues from Brescia, and the military personages passing that way. Brescia remained always the theatre of war in northern Italy, and Venice never failed to recognize her importance. In former years, she had given the little town hopes of retrieving her fortunes and developing her resources: but the hope was never to be fulfilled.

This state of affairs was the main subject of conversation in the home of the Patengolas, during these early months of 1517 after Angela's arrival. When Signor Patengola came home of an evening bringing with him, perhaps, Angela's friend, Antonio Romano, the Gallos, Agostino and his sister Hippolyta, — all folk of one mind and good citizens, — what talk went around of present conditions, of the fearful Sire de Lautrec and his Swiss soldiery, he who was such a dread to the people that a Brescian prayer against him was set on the statute books of the city.<sup>7</sup> Verily, as the future

<sup>5</sup> See Zanelli, *op. cit.*, p. 34: also Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, 68. Dr. Agostino Zanelli, scholar and professor of History successively in several Italian universities, prominent member of the Lombard Historical Society, has been the leading spirit of a group of Brescian scholars publishing valuable researches notably between 1885 and 1910: these, Count Greppi, now President of the Society, courteously made available for our present purpose.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix, Note B, *Brescian Chronology*.

<sup>7</sup> Odorici: Vol. IX, p. 166. "O Signore," runs the prayer against the Swiss,

revealed, they had reason to fear these Swiss, "with their irascible spirit!"

The Brescian territories of the time,<sup>8</sup> according to reports of Venetian Podestas sent to oversee the municipality, as well as the memoirs of Brescian citizens, would be a stretch of something like a hundred miles in length, forty or fifty miles in width, with population, approximating, three hundred thousand in three hundred eighty towns and castles, "any one of them every bit as good as any good town in Italy!"<sup>9</sup> There were three valleys and a plain, watered by a divided stream called Mella, which caused the irrigation dispute with their neighbor, Cremona. Paolo Correr, Podesta, tells<sup>10</sup> of mills outside the town and of rivers which purge the city, and of fountains supplied by an aqueduct two miles away, so that not only the piazza and public streets, but also private houses, are accommodated.

And rich! How proud were Angela and all her friends of the town which Dante had called

*"Brescia la forte! Brescia la ferrea!  
Brescia, Lionessa d'Italia!"*

"for all sorts of iron and steel wares are made, agricultural as well as military" reported the gloating Tiepoli writing to the Venetian Senate, and this with an enormous wool-trade which kept the little emporium busy even while the Imperial armies were doing their worst.

Brescia had scarcely ever seen such an epoch of rapidly-shifting events as those first years of Angela's. As she came along from Desenzano, her party met a challenge at every cross-road, for that very same year, the city had been attacked one night and was barely saved a scene of midnight horror, by the rather ludicrous fact of scaling-ladders proving too short for the walls.<sup>11</sup>

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"che noi tutti avete liberati dall'impeto degli Svizzeri, ch'altro spirito non hanno che nell'ira pei meriti della Vergine, durante il loro passaggio per queste contrade, a te supplichiamo perche ne riceva sotto l'ombra tua per la tua passione e pel concepimento della Vergine tua Madre."

<sup>8</sup> See Zanelli, *La Devozione di Brescia* in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, a Venezia, April, 1912.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of Podesta Nicolai Theupoli*, Mar. 22, 1527, in Zanelli, *op. cit.*, B. a V.

<sup>10</sup> *Relazione fatta per Paolo Correr*, in Zanelli, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*

## II

Angela soon became merged in the city's life, a woman of calm thought and quiet purpose. The names associated with her there are nearly all of the most prominent in the political history of the times: Lodrone, Luzzago, Avogadro, Gavardo, Martinenghi; and a number of these families gave their young daughters, in after years, to help with her teaching project. She spent the first six months in the Patengola home, adapting herself with a wisdom that impressed the early biographers, “she, who always gave you to understand that her chief motive in dealing with others was to gain souls for Heaven.” She softened the rigors of her private life so as to appear less singular and to yield with less conspicuous condescension to the wishes of her hostess, whose only consolation she was,<sup>12</sup> very sensibly avoiding devotional practice disagreeable to the harmony of family routine. And Donna Patengola's friends were not slow to recognize Angela's qualities. No matter how austere she was personally, they always found her sweet and approachable.

“Show me your friends and I will tell you what you are,” is an ancient adage quite to the point in her case. The Romani, Patengolas, Luzzagos, Gambaras, Martinenghi, all the rich figures of that ripe age, throw new light upon this woman and her dominating idea. They are long passed from dust unto dust, but the creative work which she, under the influence of her generation, brought into being still throbs with life. As we glance from face to face of these people who were her neighbors and intimates, the lines of her character glow and her personality looks out upon us despite the obscurity in which time has contrived to screen it.

In the sala of her friend she met one rich merchant, Antonio di Romani, who was destined to play a part in her future life-work, one of the earnest, honest characters of that age, for whom religion colored all things. Through him she found the way to the hospitals and the homes of the poor; and often, when Angela went travelling, as they always travelled in those days in a party for safety, Romano was apt to be of the number.

<sup>12</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*

There, too, she met Agostino Gallo and his sister, Hippolyta, good friends of ensuing years, gay-hearted people, with whom she by temperament found much in common; they were the kind of people whom the old Brescian proverbs, with their peculiar humorous turn, show forth so well, full of quip and jest.<sup>13</sup>

Agostino had the faculty of keeping friends in merry mood, and of writing books in merry vein; a lover of country-life, agriculture, villa-society, improving the peasants' lands, the vineyards, and flax-growing. He enjoyed the rugged sense of the peasantry and brought to Angela many a joke. He with his entire family became her sworn friends. Long after her death when they brought the old gentleman out to testify under oath that she was holy enough to be canonized, he described with naïve simplicity the friendship that had existed between them:

"Not only I myself did not know how to live without her, but my wife, too, and all my family were the same; and certainly, my sister Hippolyta, although she was married, was very intimate with Angela; and she was even more so," he adds, rather significantly, "when her husband died in fifteen twenty-eight."<sup>14</sup>

Gallo is undoubtedly the limner of Angela's personality. His deposition, upon which we shall levy now and then, has the knack of making her trailing clouds of glory come down to earth with a human thud. Especially is he valuable<sup>15</sup> in depicting those evanescent mystical experiences in such a way that their seeming unreality is swept off like a cobweb. Keep your eye on Agostino Gallo, you who would know the true Angela and her true mind!

### III

Italian society at its best during Angela's life time was governed by tacit or avowed rules of good sense and propriety, so that the women who formed centres of the most brilliant circles could become famous and illustrious without in any way compromising

<sup>13</sup> Rossi, *Uomini Illustri da Brescia*, says: "The Galli are both noble, and Notable."

<sup>14</sup> Gallo: Sworn testimony, in Bertolotti. *Storia di S. A. Merici*, Brescia, 1923.

<sup>15</sup> For the solid details of Angela's rather elusive career see also the testimony sworn to by Antonio Romano, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*



their reputation.<sup>16</sup> To such people Caterina Patengola belonged; to that class of strong, pure women, whose native dignity and profound religious spirit was the basis of family life among the Christian Humanists. These women, as Burckhardt remarks, had no thought of the public. Their function was to influence distinguished men. Pastor calls attention to the guard kept over religion and morals in the Christian scholar's household at that time, by the noble and capable women whose portraits lend such singular grace to the frescoes of the day. An easy dignity, a graceful wit and charm prevailed, a culture at the time purely Italian,<sup>17</sup> and known to the rest of Europe only at a later date.

Distinguished and highly refined, then, were the ladies to whose villas along Lake Garda Angela found her way on errands of charity, and these are the women she knew in Brescia, ladies whose costume is shown in paintings like Paul Veronese's Marriage of St. Catherine.<sup>18</sup> In Bayard's *Chronicle* there is a cut of a matron of Brescia; she wears a Medici ruff, a head-dress like Mary, Queen of Scots; her hair is parted and drawn full over the ears, like that of Brescian women in Moretto's paintings, a style that reappears in Calcinardi's idealized paintings of Angela herself.

In Italy there was a steady movement towards a fusion of classes, social intercourse now ignoring caste distinctions to base itself simply upon the existence of an educated class in modern acceptation of the term.

Women, the dilettante ladies, who at ten had been reading the Georgics, were now busily shaping a theory of living which they fondly hoped would regenerate the world. Everything was to be based upon soul: soul-friendship, soul-love. Men sat at their feet to learn. It was the age of Feminism. The lovely creatures who studied, and read, and conversed at the spring, in quasi-eclogues,

<sup>16</sup> Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> Wherever social functions are mentioned in the memoirs of that day, the refinements of poetry, singing and musical instruments are expressly mentioned. *Della Casa's Handbook of Politeness* had been popular for a century, a good guide to manners. See Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, II, 159.

<sup>18</sup> St. Catherine wears a gorgeous gown of heavy blue-flowered brocade, full-skirted, with close-fitting waist cut low and bordered with jewels; full brocade sleeves edged with scallops opening over a wrinkled close under-sleeve, long on the hand. See Molmenti, *op. cit.*, I, Pt. II.

flattering, and reciprocally flattered by the literati among the higher prelates, formed for the moment, that bubble known in the history of thought as Platonism; for the nonce, these "bibliennes," these "clergywomen," as a witty Frenchman designates them, rolled their eyes and talked wisely, if a little too transcendently, of the Scriptures. With these, sincere as one might avow them, Caterina Patengola and Angela Merici held but little in common.

Their morbid interest in themselves, their super-mundane mysticism, was quite contrary to the robust activity which characterized Angela Merici's life-work. Platonism, it would not take her long to observe, was a mere balloon. Furthermore, to a mind like hers, it was not a trifle but a sinister thing, for however innocently vaunted, she knew that it concealed a barb against the exquisite quality of religious virginity. It actually resulted — from the inaccessibility of women, thus shrouded in a false nimbus of what they called soul-love, — in a reaction towards general looseness in the conception of the marriage bond. So, as is the way of human things, the movement finally dissolved in the religious crisis of the sixteenth century, — that orgy of history, as some one has called it.

It was just at this point that Platonism came under Angela's notice, — at its dissolving point. Fortunately for her, these fascinating jugglers in the transcendental were for the most part such ladies of rank as figured in the circles of contemporary politics and Humanism, women of her passing acquaintance, whereas those with whom she came shoulder to shoulder in her new life at Brescia were of the more conservative noble class, not so high socially, perhaps, but more sensible, and never mannish. Angela was not interested in the generalizations of philosophy. As will be seen, her judgment stood for the individual and practical.

It is to be remarked that with all the sprightly freedom of discussion, the high-toned Platonic friendships, the new emancipation of women, the age set limitations upon the young girls, who here played no part in social life, and who, even when not brought up in monasteries to be launched suddenly upon a formidable world, were yet always carefully excluded from social gatherings. Donna Patengola, for instance, had educated her daughter, Monica, after her own heart, and betrothed her to a Brescian gentleman, yet

Monica seems to have played no part in the social life either at Padenghe or at Brescia. The Italian traveller was astonished at the comparative freedom of young girls in England and the Netherlands. Was their absence in Italy the cause of the license creeping into society? It surely had its significance.

Upon this subject, as we shall see, Angela Merici was to form definite opinions. As she sat at table with the Patengolas and their friends, she regarded their talk from a point of view they little dreamed of, less an interested talker than a wise listener. What attracted these people to her was not alone her religious example, "but" says Madame Girelli, "a gift peculiarly her own, a most sweet mildness which enamored all who approached her. Her air was serious and devout, with a certain habitual serenity which was never lost nor changed even in old age, and which made her presence very pleasing. She was rather short of stature, with robust build attenuated from continual penances: delicately moulded, of lively disposition, the purity of her mind betraying itself in the light of her face."<sup>19</sup> And what attracted her on her part to this circle of the Patengolas was her ready sympathy. These people were suffering, with a suffering more acute by reason of their natural bent for what was humorous and gay.<sup>20</sup> She felt intuitively all their violent reactions, and though she practiced neither their luxury nor their laxity, she understood their spirit.

#### IV

But better than its individual ladies with their cosmetics and their theories, better than its men, nothing so well enables one to visualize that life which was now to react upon Angela's mind and aspirations, as the customs which the good old city of Brescia used to have, and especially in the celebration of Our Lady's Assumption, August fifteenth. Of all civic festivals the "Assunta" ranked first, then as now, in all Italian districts. In this mediaeval carnival, you read her townsmen's dominant note of religious earnestness, and at

<sup>19</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> See Zanelli, on Cassa, in *Arch. Veneto*, 1889. Zanelli accounts for both the prevailing luxury and the laxity, by the reaction of war upon a race that were naturally so humorous and so gay.

the same time, the ceaseless turmoil of their political life, holding on so characteristically to their subject-territories, and commingled with all this, like overtones, their peculiar spirit of merriment and wild mirth as of a wilful child, relaxing even into a conviviality that became amazingly sensual in its abandonment. And what was it they were about, these pleasure-loving people?

On the Vigil of the Assumption, then, about nine o'clock, the bells would begin to ring out from all the towers of Brescia and they kept on pealing all night. Then must the Biancosis and the Mericis with kith and kin that had come up to the city for the festa, fall into line for the great Procession of Wax! wherein the trumpets preceded the gorgeous guildsmen while the Podesta and all the grandees and bigwigs marched in great array, carrying lighted candles, from the Podesta's house to the Cathedral and, there, "at the altar of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they offered said wax, which two appointed notable citizens received," according to the Brescian statutes:<sup>21</sup> the wax being levied upon each citizen, from the butcher to the schoolmaster and the ploughman, for the support of the Cathedral altars.

Every scholar had to offer four ounces of wax, every schoolmaster, one pound. All shops must close except the chandler's. It was an ancient custom which had a decided political significance, for the country people, folk of the commune, had each to bring or send his quota of wax, thus offering an homage of subjection to the strong old city of Brescia. Statute upon statute tells of the importance of this significant episode in Brescian history, bespeaking the eternal trouble it was to keep order on the festival day, or to settle the quantity of wax, or else to recall citizens or contadini who tried to evade the law, until finally, in the fifteenth century the books of the municipality show forth a significant struggle to restrain the licentiousness of the races which had come in to cap the climax of civic festivity. The record is of a curious and characteristic altercation between rulers and ancients who condemn these as demoniac, and a populace who desired them so strongly, that they repeatedly forced the hands of the Brescian magistracy.

The procession always started out very decorously. By law the

<sup>21</sup> Prov. of 1430, A.D.



Podesta himself had to open the Church door: by law the difference in the amount of wax to be given was exactly discriminated: by law each quadra of the city marched in gala dress, with lighted candles: each Venetian gentleman and each Brescian gentleman had to give three libbre of candles, and others in like proportion. It must have been a great sight! But while the monster procession was breaking up at the finale, the butchers, by immemorial custom, let loose in the Piazza and the Corso of Porta Brusciata, a bull . . . greatly upsetting the piety of the crowd, and profoundly dismaying the psalmodists! Then, with sudden reversal, appeared suddenly in the streets, a Penelope, — an abandoned woman — to race with his Bovine Highness, to the huge merriment of the crowd! one Penelope, two, three, many! The fat was in the fire! Now, Now!

About high noon, the sputtering candles were left to the tender graces of the smiling Madonna in the Cathedral, while all the devotees ran helter skelter to read the bulletins for the races, which would begin at three. “First the girls will run, beginning at Porta San Giovanni to the Hospital: then the asses, then the boys, then the horses”! “Religion,” comments Zanelli, “did not prevent this people after assisting at the solemn function at Church in honor of Mary Immaculate from hurrying to crowd the streets for the enjoyment of the inhuman, unchristian sight of races of abandoned women, whom the prejudices and sensuality of the age condemned to an ignominious pillory!” Each race began at a different point in the city. What surging of crowds: what roaring of bulls! what laughter and trumpeting! what carnival! and the runners were accompanied along their course by the highest officers of the municipality. Furthermore, while the race was in progress, to add to the excitement, it was the ancient privilege of the Millers’ Guild, to throw flour and dirt from behind at the spectators, “which was very risky and inconvenient” the statutes declared, and which custom had eventually to be punished by fines! Prizes awarded to the perspiring winners were a yard of scarlatto and a pair of spurs: a cock in a cage and a string of garlic: four yards of blue cloth: four yards of red cloth: these were carried on decorated poles by city officials dressed, at the city’s expense, in municipal coat-of-arms!

The statute books of Angela's lifetime, as well as those of her father's before her, form a curious history of the fluctuations of the human conscience regarding these races. In time of siege, the good Brescians piously held a procession of priests and people, instead, carrying relics of the Holy Cross, but war over, the same thing once more! More sumptuous clothes, more races! And the city had to bear the enormous expense! About the opening of the fifteen hundreds, the Franciscan Friars finally prevailed upon the people to eliminate at least the indecent and the bestial element of the races; so that what Angela saw in Brescia on Assumption Day was a somewhat milder form of civic intoxication, the rather, as war and grief had, by 1520 subdued the extravagance of the festival.<sup>22</sup> Be that as it may, no more illuminative glimpse of her people could be had, no better idea of the ready-heartedness of the men and women among whom she was beginning to count herself as one. Ready-hearted, that was the word. That very quality was one that she stamped to start with, upon her Teaching Idea: a ready-heartedness broad enough for the wear and tear of centuries. The Assunta frolic showed the very point in which their Christian training was at fault: religion was apt to be a sentiment instead of a principle of correct conduct, self-control, for instance. The Assunta was not the only matter in which the Brescians lost their heads.

## V

However much she might naturally enjoy good companionship, Angela had never intended making a permanent home in a fashionable quarter of the city frequented by people of the gayer sort, so she decided to accept an apartment where with a companion<sup>23</sup> she could live a retired life. Antonio Romano placed one at her disposal to use just as she liked and as long as she liked, and there in the Street of St. Agatha, in a respectable part of the

<sup>22</sup> Angela must have endorsed heartily the establishment in Brescia that year of the new institute for penitents, which with the Hospital for Incurables, referred to by Correr Podesta, was established through the efforts of Bartholomew Stella, with the support of the nun, Laura Mignani; it was designed to lessen and correct the public evil of feminine prostitution during that disordered epoch of war and pestilence. See Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>23</sup> See Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

town, she dwelt for ten or twelve years, the place well suited to her simple habits, and that unconventionality of social intercourse which seems to have been characteristic of these years; she found in her new home privacy and a life of devotion, "fasts, vigils and prayer," says Nazari: "fasts, abstinence, prayers and vigils," reiterates Chizzola.<sup>24</sup> For the iron fibre of Brescian character shows in Angela's austerity, the persistent, steady self-command, which became second nature to her in an astonishing degree; daughter of the Brescian Lioness she proved herself in this.

Curiously enough, the era of the Italian wars was coincident in Lombardy with that strange new life, that new birth which stirred all Italy; nor could the miseries of the war suppress it.<sup>25</sup> Love of Renaissance culture, of the classics, enriched the city with commentaries and new editions, a cynosure for collectors. Angela with the rest prided herself in the Cathedral, a monument of fifteenth century art, — built by the municipality under stress of the new movement. There were other sumptuous buildings. Tournaments, jousts, dignified receptions and dinner parties enlivened the days of noble and cavalier when not in the saddle, while ladies lent deaf ear to fiery denunciations, assuming showy costumes and new modes of ornament to make themselves the more fascinating.

Yet the city, earnest always underneath its scintillating exterior, abounded at the opening of the sixteenth century in distinguished intellects, — philosophers, lawyers, physicians, and men of the celebrated equestrian order, like the Martinenghi and Avogadri.

Hers was likewise a city of illustrious women whose learning and sanctity had become traditional. Laura Ceretae was just then inditing her elegant letters, one of the legacies of the Renaissance.<sup>26</sup> But if one really sought the richest study of the feminine Brescian contemporary with Angela, research into the life and personality of

<sup>24</sup> Sworn testimony, Aug. 10, 1568, in Bertolotti, p. 230.

<sup>25</sup> Zanelli observes the very opposite tendencies which swayed the minds of the people: feverish activity to revive a forgotten antiquity, sumptuous frivolity in the intervals of furious wars; and at the same time, enthusiastic belief in miracles, — even erecting churches on the places where they were said to have taken place. See *Predicatori in Brescia nel quattrocento*, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> *Letters (Epistolae Patavii) of Laura Ceretae of Brescia*, Jacobo ed. Brescia, 1640.

Veronica Gambara would amply repay the burning of midnight oil.<sup>27</sup>

Angela often saw her in the Cathedral at Brescia or riding horseback with her cavalcade down the Brescian valleys. Veronica was the typical Renaissance woman, the dilettante, lover of letters, scholar, with a youth of bubbling enthusiasm, a maturity full of the noble fire and tenderness of the Italian Christian mother, and the declining years of a diplomat, who had two sons to launch in the ports of life, busily writing letters, entertaining Emperors, Kings, all the literati and exquisite personages of the world of Italian diplomacy. Brescian by birth she came by marriage to Correggio, returning often to pass fleeting months in her native province, while Angela was moving about there thinking of what she was going to do.

Veronica Gambara and Angela Merici represent the spirit of the Renaissance each as a type; Veronica, the rich earth-stored wine, transfused with a thousand essences from mother-earth, forceful, stimulating; Angela, the pure water of the stream, clear with morning freshness, uncontaminated, and with incommensurable future power in its limpidity. Or, the Lady of Correggio appeals like those superb, voluptuous, feminine types whom Titian loved to paint, with gorgeous exuberance, and I know not what of color; Angela, like that Virgin of Perugino, simple but spiritually beautiful against the lunette, her head slightly drooping, with a certain pensive longing in her face. The Gambara lady swept through the world, flashing radiance; the saint submerged herself in the strong ray of light which her inspiration cast down through the ages. One was perhaps a saintly genius: the other was a genius-saint.

The Brescian artists were working all around in Angela's day. The scaffolding of Santa Maria Caldrera was still up for Romanino was painting his masterpiece of the Brescian martyrs, while under the artist's hand the chalice was just emerging, from which he conceived the venerable bishop Apollonius giving to them the Body of Christ; Angela Merici, so devoted to the Brescian martyrs that she took up her dwelling near them, must have stopped often to

<sup>27</sup> Zamboni's *Vita di Veronica Gambara*, supplemented by her *Letters and Poems* is a truly fascinating picture of a beautiful and admirable woman.



see the progress of this wonderful picture, and loved it, the pride of the town.

Churches were going up in her time, with whatever placidity of progress the alarms of war would permit, while doorways and façades all through the city were being retouched by the hands of Renaissance artists. Well those artists grew to know Donna Merici's face: they painted her after her death. A veritable fringe of glory from Venice had fallen over little Brescia in that first half of the sixteenth century. The spirit of life was throbbing in every vein of the place. It was Brescia's high-tide, her June.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE WOMAN OF THE INSPIRATION

#### I

IF it be true, — we have only the poet's word for it, — that the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, Angela Merici ought to be able to tell something about them. Imagine yourself at fifteen, and you a girl, — thrilled with some sort of Heavenly inspiration that you are to start some great work in the world, some work for the uplift of women, — *start a work some day before you die*, — in the city of Brescia!

Fancy yourself without mother, without father, without anybody that cares anything at all about it, except the very few intimates that look blankly into your face as you tell your story, and probably fail to believe a word you say. You go on, groping, groping, sometimes doubting, sometimes sure, meditating all the different things you *could* do, all the many things that *need* doing, — until one day, unexpectedly, you find yourself standing upon the spot that was indicated in what you took to be Heavenly revelation. There you are! How would it seem, — to you, to me, to anybody? "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy! "

At this stage, therefore, it may be as well to look back and assemble those points wherein nature, environment, heredity, had shaped the character of this woman who seems likely to write her name large in the history of Brescia, "that very rich and opulent town," as Gaston de Foix called it.

Out of a race physically inured to struggle, from time immemorial, with a long tradition of war behind it, — for Emperors had sat down before the gates of a Brescia unyielding! — here is a woman who can hold her will against every gnawing demand of her body: a woman to make up her mind and stick to it through thick

and thin. Stock from Biancosi and Merici, was it not, which had eugenically produced a type distinguished by probity, simplicity, and a mind not to be clouded with doubts; believers in right, doers of right, calmly indifferent to anything else. "Let these opinions pass," Angela once wrote; "and you, — you pray!" But with the kind of womanhood that is unrelenting in a fight, with the spirit of the mother protecting the cub. "Shield your little flock!" she urged her companions; a stock of good mettle, pointing to individual power. This stock blossomed memorably in Angela.

Hers, too, were aspirations shaped in an ideal setting of winds and waters, spiritual ideals, with a liberty, a breadth, for a work whose stage might be the whole world. Angela's formula for work had something of the simplicity of Christ's own, "Go, teach all nations:" yet the Master's Teaching-Idea was none the less His because the Church afterwards developed it into a completely detailed mechanism. In point of fact, Angela's idea was simply Christ's reiterated, as we shall see.

Nor did the customs of her native race fail to characterize this woman of the inspiration. Her imagination was changed and quickened with their folk-lore, opening up to her mind the possibilities of this world and the next. Sharing their merriment and impulse, she too was swayed to sympathy and ready-heartedness. With them she was self-sufficient and fearless. Their receptivity and giftedness were hers; she had the magnetism to lead an entire city, and she did. Their profound religious bent was eminently hers.

In her twenty-five years of life she had by now experienced a social environment that ranged from the intimacy of solitaires and anchorets to belles of Renaissance society. She knew the simplicity of farm-life and of fishing smacks, and the Festas along the Riviera with their lutes and confetti. Alarms of war had taught her alertness while the philosophies and refinements of a dilettante culture were ripening her judgment. And with all this, her world was big. There were big issues at stake in her day: big forces were moving in Italy: big powers wrangling about her native land. The shifting panorama of kings, emperors, popes, with their changing leagues, could not but affect her mind with a large resiliency.

Her own instincts were normal. She was the typical daughter of a normal home. Yet in her life-experience she was exceptional under a series of bereavements that would rudely violate all those instincts, so that throughout the impressionable period of adolescence, far from being normal, her life presented a new and fundamental change of horizon for almost every new year.

In the midst of a voluptuous and showy world her friends found her retiring; alone, with scarcely a single close family-tie remaining, they found her ready and sympathetic, helpful and inspiring. In the face of every obstacle, persistent; in the confusion of ideas, unflinchingly orthodox; adaptable, cheerful, such was Angela when she came to Brescia to work out what she called her heavenly inspiration. It remains to be seen how this was accomplished.

## II

One of the first qualities to strike the observer in sifting out the reaction of the age upon Angela's life and work is her remarkable common sense. It is shown first of all in the way in which she lived. No shrinking recluse was she! She became a centre of influence, one of those characters whom the municipality, in true mediaeval fashion, grew to claim as its very own.

The few facts which tradition has handed down reveal life and activity and movement. She was quite a traveller; she went flitting through cities in a fashion that reads very shadow-like, yet she left substantial traces of herself wherever she went. First, we find her moving through the corridors of ducal palaces, then at Castiglione she stops over night to plead with the Prince in behalf of an outlaw, then she joins the Venetian state pilgrimage to the Holy Land; there is talk of her in the haunts of the poor and the sick; she passes up the staircase of the Vatican Palace; and then, pestilence drives her to Cremona where for a while she finds a new field of service.

Even the Bull of Angela's canonization notes her travels:

"Leaving Desenzano, her native land, she traversed various countries, scattering everywhere deeds of charity. . . . Undertaking divers pilgrimages. . . . She set out for Palestine . . . landed hap-



pily at Venice. . . . She returned to Brescia. . . . She came to our city of Rome. . . . Returning from Rome . . . visited Mt. Varallo. . . . She was detained at Cremona longer than she expected. . . . Returning to Brescia.”<sup>1</sup>

Past master in horsemanship, she used to canter over all the roads in her native district; she knew all the towns; in those days, when relays of horses had to be secured at every stopping-place upon the way, hostels and inns being for the most part rude, she travelled usually in some company, and always with a few gentlemen of her own acquaintance; from her childhood upon Lake Garda, she knew what it was to paddle in the water, to row from place to place, perhaps erect and barearmed in picturesque Italian peasant fashion; she knew the boatman's craft, and grew strong and sturdy plying the oars; we picture her out on the white-caps, crossing to Salò with her young cousins, her hair flying in the wind, her cheeks tingling under the touch of the breeze. These were the waters she loved, these were her native airs, these were the lights and tints familiar from infancy. The breath of freedom was part of her existence. Angela loved the soft trail across the water, the quickening gallop down the road. The equestrian painting done by the artist Facchino presents a noble conception of her which is unforgettable.

In such things she was the daughter of her age, for the Renaissance women were physically a strong race, and among the Lombard girls and women an ideal of physical excellence and personal bearing prevailed, a care for diet and exercise.

*“Chi mangia bene e purga il corpo  
Non teme la morte”*<sup>2</sup>

was a familiar saying: “No need to die as long as you eat well and look after your digestion.” The hardier classes like the Mericis inured themselves to exertion and the cold, of which the Lake Garda region provided a varying experience.

All the ladies rode; the little girls too, “one on the saddle and one on the crupper,”<sup>3</sup> as the governess of Elisabetta and Madda-

<sup>1</sup> *Spirit of St. Angela.*

<sup>2</sup> Rosa, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Edgcombe Staley, quoting a letter of Yolanda da Bredi.

lena Gonzaga reported of them; and of such was Angela. "In my time," says Castiglione, "I have seen women ride, hunt, play at tennis, and perform feats of arms."

It is natural that the new note of freedom<sup>4</sup> in the air led to extremes, such as are suggested in an Italian caricature of Angela's day,<sup>5</sup> showing a satirical sketch of women violently struggling to wear trunk-hose.<sup>6</sup> Angela belonged to a class of society among whom there was considerable lifting of eyebrows at the new quasi-emancipation of women; and she was sensitive to the strife of opposite tendencies waxing sometimes so serious as to end in certain learned women who were yet accomplished, liberty-loving, going to take the veil in some quiet cloister, as did Cecelia Gonzaga, Isotta Nogarola, and others.

But while she was no recluse, she was in no wise a gad-about. Although she had many devoted friends who would only too willingly have adopted her into their family circle, she always withdrew in the end, in order to live by herself. Yet when occasion brought her into their homes, she sensibly adapted herself and never seemed to jar upon the domestic harmony; she had too much common sense to make herself conspicuous; she knew instinctively that this would defeat her purpose. Neither did she sojourn in the household of others nor undertake visits to other cities unless she had some definite motive of charity.

Everybody understood her mode of life, for she dwelt in the midst of a Catholic people who knew the springs and motives of her conduct, and to whom her ascetic ways were not at all startling, because these were already familiar in a hundred other contemporary personalities. So no comment was passed upon her habits beyond that approval which her virtue naturally drew from her fellow townsmen. That a gifted woman could live by choice in a bare apartment with a rough pallet to sleep upon was nothing new to the people of the sixteenth century, nor did they think

<sup>4</sup> All Italian girls could swim, row, and fly a hawk. Il Cortegiano says she should be judge and not participator; but she is to dance and devise the sports and pastimes of society.

<sup>5</sup> 1450 A.D.

<sup>6</sup> M. de la Claviere, *Women of the Renaissance, a Study in Feminism*, London, 1901, Introd. p. 7.

anything of her depending upon her neighbor for bread. The day had not yet passed when the poor were still honored in the old Christian sense, and he who fed them still felt he was privileged to feed three:

*"Himself, his hungry neighbor, and Me!"*

*"Not what we give, but what we share,  
For the gift without the giver is bare."*<sup>7</sup>

So these mendicant habits of hers in no wise lowered her social status; called, as she might be, to live as the poorest and to work among the poor, her friends were among the substantial people of the town, who delighted in visiting her apartment.

### III

The kind of people that sought her out is likewise significant of the practical side of her nature. The house where she lived<sup>8</sup> speedily came to be crowded from morning till night with all sorts of people, eager to receive from Angela some word of counsel. There were lawyers and theologians, mothers of families, university students, merchants and princes in her room.

But how did she acquire such an influence? Girelli attributes it to a gift peculiarly hers, "Angela was so sweet, so condescending, so approachable"<sup>9</sup>! And her influence grew apace.<sup>10</sup> "In her maternal love," wrote her secretary, "she embraced all her fellow beings, and the worst she cherished most. If she could not convert him," he added naïvely, "at least, by kind words, she managed to induce him to do some good act, or else to do less evil, so that at death he might obtain some refreshment, or in Hell, at least less torment." And Romano, at whose house she lived for so long, testified, that when people met with misfortune they would hurry to his house in search of Angela or else would send for her to come to them, and she would at once accommodate herself, like a loving mother. The Brescians called her Madre, or Sorella.

<sup>7</sup> Lowell, *Vision of Sir Launfal*.

<sup>8</sup> Sworn deposition of Agostino Gallo, Oct. 29, 1568: in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

<sup>9</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Die hl. A Merici von M. Vincentia Neusee. See p. 49.

Gradually it became understood that she possessed an infused Gift of Knowledge for the people began to see that she had the learning of a specialist without ever having been a student. She translated Latin hymns and prayers into Italian and she conversed in Latin. At a time when learning and pedantry were all the rage, one can imagine how the report of this spread from mouth to mouth, and how savants and theologians began to drop in at Casa Romano: but they departed, satisfied that Angela possessed the supernatural light of the Holy Ghost.

Among those whose curiosity was piqued by the gossip about Romano's friend, there came one day a young fellow, student of the University of Padua, a young coxcomb, superbly dressed, with all the airs of a member of the Faculty. Angela mildly asked what he wanted.

"I am studying for the priesthood," he replied, "and I'd like to know if God really calls me to it."

"You seem to me too vain," answered Angela, "to enter upon a state where modesty is the chief virtue. Let us see you give up this rich costume, and then I shall tell you what I think of your vocation."

The rather disconcerted youth did what she told him. He was Francesco Bertazzolo, and proved to be a very fine priest who afterwards died in the odor of sanctity.

#### IV

Angela's influence over the consciences of men appeared in a number of instances. That of the Gavardo family was one, ancient nobility of Brescia they, rich in honors, typical Renaissance people, — Gian Battista, especially, to whom the proverb of the old Roman cavalry was often applied, that he was "one of the favored few who possessed gold and a white horse"; presumably, because as Rossi declares, they never had any jousts in Italy without him, and, always victorious, he was recognized even in a mask by the way he used to make his horse rear on its hindlegs; handsome, generous, patron of letters, and a devout man, too, and devoutly was he buried in the Franciscan church which Angela so loved!



Orsola Gavado was one of Angela's first daughters; and it was Thomas Gavardo who was wont to declare that he would certainly owe the salvation of his soul to Angela's constant advice and guidance!

A striking story<sup>11</sup> is told of her personal influence upon Francesco Martinengo, one of that dashing Brescian family, which, of itself, forms a fifteenth-century galaxy. The young man was in deadly feud with one Filippo da Sala, the two swashbucklers breaking forever like dangerous comets through the city streets, their retainers biting thumbs and matching rapiers, and night made hideous with their brawls. The governor tried in vain to intervene. Each day a bloody crisis was threatening. Finally the women of the families begged Angela to try to bring them peace. She betook herself to the home of each of the two, who were naturally astonished at such a visit, though they treated her with respect. Finally, she prevailed upon the two wranglers to meet at her little apartment; they came slinking in by different ways and a stormy scene ensued. Before this calm woman whose presence breathed of the Divine Goodness, they found themselves somehow listening to reason, and at last to conciliation. It made talk in Brescia for days, bringing Francesco Sforza to stop in Brescia on his way from Milan to see if it were true. The Martinengo family later gave a daughter to Angela's Company, the little Chiara Martinengo. Nor was this the only feud which Angela witnessed among them, nor was she concerned without reason. For not many years later there fell in a street brawl, that famous Giorgio Martinengo, whom Rossi calls *Il Superbo Italiano*, handsome, majestic, with reddish beard, darling of the High Renaissance, one of the first literati of his day, in letters, prose, and verse: he quarreled recklessly with Count Aloysio Avogadro, and with a band at his heels went trailing one morning early through the Brescian Piazza, though it had been prohibited to bear arms in public: he was assaulted in the Merchants' Foro with fierce bloodshed, and the two gentlemen with him and their servants: they got them into an armorer's shop where the bitter fight went on, Giorgio's intrepidity and scorn infuriating his opponents. He fell, transpierced with thirty wounds, and closed

<sup>11</sup> Deposition of Antonio Romano, June 21, 1568, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

his life with a Greek sentence upon his lips, ripe fruit of the Pagan Renaissance! <sup>12</sup>

Among these Avogadri, too, Angela counted many a friend. They were a patrician family, intensely patriotic, and a faction in Brescia.

All these Brescians reflect upon her personality, as from a thousand facets, the color of her age, and the spirit she breathed in the air around her. It is not only events that shape character, but more subtle still is the fine reaction of the people that make up our little world. It was her intercourse with all these that made her quick to understand the people with whom she would have to deal in the building up of her teaching-idea. An heiress of the peculiar intuition and tact which characterize the Latin races, she understood just how to combine the practices of religion with a sincere human interest in her neighbor: as she did when she pleaded with Prince Luigi Gonzaga for an outlawed relative,<sup>13</sup> stopping off on a pilgrimage to see the Prince at his castle of Castiglione. From that moment she became a great favorite of the Gonzagas.

## V

But now that she was established in Brescia, her thoughts turned rather impatiently to the inspiration of her girlhood and the possibilities of its ever being materialized. Not much prospect, it seemed.

At no time and in no sense did she design the establishing of a school. She found Brescia fairly well provided with schools for boys. The methods of Vittorino da Feltre had already been carried into Brescia <sup>14</sup> by Gabriel Concorreggio, whose famous school in the Piazza Grande was once the pet of the commune, held on to through thick and thin during the wars, with vivid appreciation of this "valiant but unfortunate disciple of Vittorino,"<sup>14</sup> reader of poetry, master of Grammar and Rhetoric. Through trial and tribulation of the century's second half, numbers of Brescian lads received training in the most approved fashion of the Maison Joyeuse,

<sup>12</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 198, 199.

<sup>13</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Zanelli gives a very interesting study of his life and work, and the vicissitudes of his experience with the city, emphasizing the city's generosity. See G. Concorreggio ed. il commune di Brescia. In *Arch. Stor. Lom.*, March, 1899.

for Concorreggio kept in touch with his old master, Vittorino, and often visited him. Angela often heard of Concorreggio in her youth; everybody knew him, and his work for boys.

On the other hand she could see for herself what the girls were learning in any of their schools, even the poorest: reading, writing, figuring in a crude way, singing, sewing. She knew what books were at their disposal. Often had she passed the busy printing shops set up by Paganini and Zanetti and Giolitti,<sup>15</sup> and shared the people's pride in the famous paper mills at Salò along the Riviera. Her own love of reading, which Gallo tells us she indulged "when she found a little spare time, or when nobody busied her in good works," would incline her to favor the diffusion of good books. She knew as well as anybody how such masters as Raffaello, Regio, Taberio, and the famous Becichemo, had all been teaching for some years in the city;<sup>16</sup> and not only that, but also, how discriminating the municipality tried to be in its choice of schoolmasters, the council stipulating "a master of character and approved doctrine."

The ideals of Francesco Arigoni, a native Brescian, express fairly well the Christian standard of the city, as yet, in 1508, unspoiled by the new doctrines. Arigoni proposed, as he said, to teach the sons of patricians and *any who so desired*, the Latin and Greek authors, "hoping to be able through the study of Letters, to stimulate the mind and heart of youth to the love of virtue." Here was a master after Angela's own heart! And she was one mind, as well, with the city in the ideal expressed in its educational ordinances, "to draw the youths of our city from evil ways!" Pity it was, that still another war swept over the town closing school-doors and frustrating hopes again. Half a century had not bettered conditions. Angela could not help contrasting her own aspirations with these, and foreseeing that any plans she might herself conceive along similar lines would dissolve in like fashion as dreams.

<sup>15</sup> Printing had spread with fine zest through the province, for in the 15th century Venetian printers issued nearly fifteen hundred books from their presses. See Molmenti, *op. cit.*, I, Pt. II, p. 270.

<sup>16</sup> Zanelli, *Del pubblico insegnamento in Brescia secolo XVI, XVII*, describes the brave struggles of the municipality for education, and the noble ideals which led it on. Brescia, 1896.

## VI

Allied to her remarkable sense of the practical, is her estimate of her own position. She was humble, but with that fearless self-esteem which is characteristic of solid virtue and good sense.

"He has chosen me, living and dead, to be mother of this Company, though of myself I am most unworthy; and having chosen me, He has given me grace to govern it."<sup>17</sup>

Herein is shown with what firmness she held the governing rein, secure of herself anchored in the Divine guidance. She employed her authority in a very positive manner, realizing that these women had grown to look up to her and that she possessed a distinct power to sway them.

"Deal with them in my name,"<sup>18</sup> she said to her ladies. And after her death they read in her Testament the deliberate words, "He has given me grace to govern this Company in accord with His Will."<sup>19</sup> There is no wavering here in the security of her position but it is security based always upon the supernatural, that of a strong character poised in a security that is not its own.

Equally certain was she of the stability of her organization. New and unprecedented as it was eventually, with every prospect of only a faltering existence for some time to come, its foundress with spiritual prevision never doubted as to its future, and ultimate success.

In this same association of ideas should be counted Angela Merici's peculiar quality of moderation. If one who spent forty years preparing for her life-work may be said to have taken her time about it, she must be regarded as a woman of deliberation. At twenty she had had her original inspiration but year upon year elapsed before her way was clear to found her institute. Her plans consequently bore a mellowness that comes only to long, long experience. She had, in the interval, learned many things for herself, and thus she was able to give her followers the principle that life admits of few absolute certainties, on the whole, and that in providing for human possibilities, the great thing to avoid is rigidity. And so her statutes sometimes comprise a direct prescription and

<sup>17</sup> *3rd Counsel*, Salvatori, p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> *3rd Counsel*, *Idem*.

<sup>19</sup> *Testament*.



at the same time what seems its opposite, the need for which she was wise enough to foresee. For instance, she said:

“Take the greatest care that the good statutes laid down especially those in the Rule be followed most diligently: but *if, according to the times, a need arise for new ones*, or for doing anything differently, let it be done prudently, and with good counsel.”<sup>20</sup>

On certain points she would be severe, but again she warned that severity is seldom serviceable and is not to be used in handling all characters. Angela always seemed to see over and beyond her point. She realized the difficulty which people would find in her institute, and she did not expect her daughters not to weary, not to have their doubts and discouragements. For all these she provided. She seemed to judge that they would find obedience hard. Perhaps there is not a wiser passage in all her writings than what she says on this subject in the 3rd Counsel:

“Be subject to the principal Mothers whom I leave in my place, as is just, and in what you do, do it in obedience to them, and not merely to follow out your own inclination.

“However, if anything should happen, in which you have just and reasonable cause to contradict or reprehend them, do it with respect and tact.

“If they do not yield to you, bear it patiently; and remember that it is right to love your Mothers, be they kind or be they harsh. Bear this in them, and take care not to complain of anything, nor murmur, nor say anything bad of them to any one, least of all to your children. But in all things pay honor and reverence to your Mothers, reflecting that if God commands us to honor our natural fathers and mothers, so much the more does He the spiritual.

“Nevertheless, if you have at heart anything that is displeasing to you in them, you could very well confer about it in secret and without scruple, with some good person who is trustworthy and experienced.

“But if it be clearly manifest that any danger has arisen to the safety and purity of your daughters, you should not on any account, approve, nor support, nor consider any one. However, act always with good advice and mature deliberation.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> 11th Bequest, Salvatori, p. 205.

<sup>21</sup> Salvatori, p. 209.

Her writings show a confidence in contrition and repentance, a belief in the chances for development and ennoblement, a quality which she had acquired in a lifetime of study of human nature. And she displayed remarkable foresight in providing for the thousand emergencies that really mould human life, even when it appears to be set upon fixed principles. These are some of the points that endeared her to her friends in Brescia, and that reassured them later when she undertook her institute.

It was the practical turn which she gave to everything, even the spiritual. The directions which she left to her children of the Company of St. Ursula were full of sound sense. She bade them be unassuming, first, because their Divine Model was humble, and second, — and note this, — from a certain spiritual thrift.

"It is not without a reason that a prudent servant of God humbles herself, ignoring her own judgment, ignoring the pleasure she feels in her own reputation. For she hopes, and awaits a further pleasure from God, and a truer glory and honor."<sup>22</sup>

Again she said, almost sharply:

"How can you advise or entice to any virtue if you haven't it yourself, or at least if you have not begun to acquire it . . . ?"<sup>23</sup>

Even here remark the wise restricting clause. In teaching these ladies of the world to be impartial with young people, once more she approached the matter from a practical point of view. Instead, for instance, of saying, You must deal impartially, she struck direct at the root, and showed them that their own judgment was apt to be false. "How do you know which of these girls is more excellent?" she asked. "If this is a spiritual concern, you have to go at it from a spiritual, supernatural standpoint. How do you know which of these girls is more pleasing in God's sight? Or which of them He intends to raise the highest? Can you know that? No. If not, you dare not follow a natural choice, for fear of advancing the one whom the King does not desire to honor." By this reasoning she gave her ladies a substantial basis for their justice.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> *1st Counsel*, Salvatori, pp. 207, 208.

<sup>23</sup> *6th Counsel*, Salvatori, p. 213.

<sup>24</sup> *8th Counsel*, Salvatori, p. 214.

## VII

In her writings that exquisite womanliness prevails, whose bloom, through all the turmoil of the ages, is one of the redeeming and hopeful qualities of human-kind. The Italian in which she wrote gives a strong impression of the feminine quality of her mind; there is such a finesse, such tact, such sweetness, such healthy and natural sincerity, and it is all suffused with a glow, an inspiration, arising from the supernatural, and irradiating the wisdom of her character and wide experience. Her style, in the Italian, has a subtle essence which loses in the translation, just as the wild pippin loses its finest fragrance while the cart jolts it from the orchard to the town.

Angela's very words themselves sound feminine:

"Most dear sisters and honorable mothers," wrote she;

"Be cordial mothers to this noble family," . . .

"this noble flock"; . . .

"that your daughters be adorned with every virtue and with good manners!"<sup>25</sup>

In these very expressions there is a certain graciousness. She bade them act, not imperiously, nor with sharpness, but they should see to it that in all things they were gentle. Gentle, sweet, cordial, such were her epithets, sounding even more feminine in her native Italian: "*soave e dolce, . . . esser piacevoli, . . . vere e cordiali madri, . . . col l'amorevolezza,*" and the like. Again and again, did she insist upon their using persuasive means to accomplish their end. She seemed to consider this of paramount importance.

"Be sweet and kind. The charity that directs all to the honor and glory of God alone, teaches discretion, and moves the heart to be now gentle, now severe as needs be."<sup>26</sup>

The ladies must counsel the young girls to conduct themselves in their own homes with good judgment; she would have them . . . civil and well controlled, these young girls, who were to form her institute. One must remember how the climate of Italy calls for long daily siestas, and that lazy habits are formed early and

<sup>25</sup> Salvatori, p. 209.

<sup>26</sup> Salvatori, p. 209.

undermine character. As to what they heard, let them take no pleasure in it, if it be not right and useful and modest. Truly such principles might transform any home, when embodied in the lovely guise of a young girl.

Thus mildly did she point the way with nothing repellant, nothing out of reason. There was no trace of coldness in Angela's practical economy. All her injunctions were mild, far-seeing and motherly. And it is in these that one can see how Angela loved her little Company, tenderly, passionately, so that from the heights of the Heavens, which alone held any charms to attract herself, she must needs be leaning over Heaven's bar to live and breathe with these children of her soul's inspiration.

"I pray you all, and beg of you, through love of the Passion of Jesus Christ, that you do all in your power to practice these few counsels which I leave you, to carry out after my death, . . . my will and my desire. I shall see if you have it at heart to please me, for know, all of you, that I am more alive than when I was in this world." <sup>27</sup>

This idea of living her future life close to her institute, Angela Merici repeated several times. In what religious founder will be found more plaintive yearning than in some of her lines to her daughters, her master passion:

"Tell them one and all that they must not wish to see me again on earth, but in Heaven." <sup>28</sup> . . . "Over and above the inestimable grace which my Love, and yours too, will give you at the hour of death, believe me as certain that then especially, you will all know me, as a true and faithful friend, since it is in great need that one recognizes true friendship." <sup>29</sup>

Twice she began with this tender address,

"Sisters dearest in the Blood of Jesus Christ, and honorable mothers! " . . .

"The last word which I repeat to you, and to which end I pray you in my blood is, that you keep in concord and unity altogether, with one heart and one will, for I tell you, if you do keep all united

<sup>27</sup> *Introd. Counsels*, Salvatori, p. 206, cf. the saying of the Little Flower, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus: "I will spend my Heaven in doing good upon earth."

<sup>28</sup> *5th Counsel*, Salvatori, pp. 210, 211, 212.

<sup>29</sup> *9th Counsel*, Salvatori, p. 215.



in heart, you will be as a strong rock, an unassailable tower, against all adversity, persecution and diabolical error.”<sup>30</sup>

Apparently, the order in which she set down her thoughts in Counsels and Testament was of small moment to her: one thing was allowed to suggest another. Not so, however, in her Rule. Here, everything is clearly marshalled, logical, and astonishingly articulated. Broad visualization and the sense of detail are both evident in the Rule: its structure betrays a mental energy and vigor, which one certainly would not expect from a woman who was all her life a mere vegetarian, all her life under-fed, who ate as much bread in a week “as she could hold in the hollow of her hand,” and slept mostly on the floor.

If Angela, in any sense, represented the new woman of her age, it was the new woman with the heart of the old, who by contrast shows forth the fallacy of the modern new woman. For fifteen centuries, the monastic Orders had developed in the flower of girlhood a spiritual maternity that expressed itself in prayer, in charity. But Angela Merici broke through this. She demanded, “Nay, give me real children. I will make of them real mothers: mothers in the flesh, mothers in the spirit:” such was her unconscious answer to Platonism. In this again, her practical sense and level-headedness stood out. She believed, with the modern woman, in “uplifting” the world, but with keen acumen, she decided to begin with the soul of the child.

## VIII

The lively Agostino Gallo, who certainly was not given to dull companionship, was very fond of her, and he declared her to have been of lively disposition, “the purity of her mind shining through the joy in her face.” He said she had an habitual serenity which she never lost.

And, yet, there is extant, a prayer of Angela’s, a precious heirloom in her Order, which, by point of contrast presents an interesting bit of psychology. Her advice to others abounds in consoling thoughts, but this prayer is the utterance of a dark hour and a soul

<sup>30</sup> *Idem.*

in travail. One can with difficulty reconcile it with the bright joyousness which she inspired in others.

"Ah, woe is me!" she lamented, "that entering into the secret of my heart, I dare not for shame raise my eyes to Heaven, because I know myself fit to be devoured in hell! and beholding in myself so many horrible things, uglinesses, shameful deeds and monstrous faults, I am constrained day and night, going, staying, working, thinking, to raise my eyes to Heaven to beg of Thee, O Lord, mercy, and time for penance!"<sup>31</sup>

Such a bit of personal prayer comes upon us as if a window were suddenly opened, looking into a soul that had appeared so forgetful of self as never to know a care. Did, then, the radiance shed upon others, arise, after all, from a self-diffidence, profound and painful, a deep sense of her own misery, her own guilt in God's sight, "going, staying, working, thinking"? Angela did not say things idly: was she never really free from fears? Yet how fearless one would take her to be.

"Console yourselves," she wrote to her daughters, "and do not doubt . . . who and what can resist Him? His light, and the joyous splendor of His truth will surround you at the moment of death, and will free you from the hands of the enemy."<sup>32</sup>

And once more,

"Of this let them have no doubt that though for the time being they have tribulation and affliction, all will soon pass, and will be changed to joy and gladness."<sup>33</sup>

But, despite the darker vein in her interior life which appears to be manifested by her own words, there are one or two episodes in her external life, showing the buoyancy of disposition which must have attracted such people as her friend Agostino Gallo. What saint for instance, ever sat upon what was presumed to be her death bed, to listen to a devoted, but rather hysterical, friend, reading her epitaph, written in advance? One can fancy Lorenzo de Medici languidly enjoying such a luxury, though with rather different sentiments. But this was a person of another kind. The

<sup>31</sup> Rule.

<sup>32</sup> *Conclusion, Counsels*, Salvatori, p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> *5th Counsel*, Salvatori, pp. 210, 211, 212.

fever which Angela had, while living in Cremona, quickly reduced her to death's door. The doctors had given her up, and the loyal Jerome Patengola was deputed to break to the patient the news, which he did with great lamenting. She was full of joy. She had lived so many years in a world of faith, that death to her was but the crossing of a portal. With a simplicity to be found only among such souls as these, Patengola set to work to compose an epitaph in sonorous Italian verse, and to read it to her as follows:

*"She who in name, in deed and in tongue  
Is of the angels one, lies herein entombed:  
A virgin who dwelt in a solitary cell  
Rejoicing there in true interior peace.  
To God ever a loving, obedient handmaid,  
Enemy was she to all that the senses pleased:  
Now doth she live in Heaven crowned  
With palms, from the hands of the Angels blest."*

*"Quella, che il nome, l'opre, e la gavella  
D'Angela tenne, quì sepolita giace.  
Vergine visse in taciturna cella,  
Godendo ivi la vera interna pace.  
Di Die diletta ed obediante ancella  
Nemica fu 'di cio', che al senso piace,  
Or vive lieta in cielo, coronato  
Di palme il crin, fra gli  
Angela beata."*<sup>34</sup>

Agostino Gallo tells the story of how she lay prostrated for many days, "so much worse, that we all saw that at any hour she might pass out of this world; so that Patengola made some verses, which he read to her, saying, 'Rejoice, Mother, that tomorrow they are going to place these verses on your tomb!'" There is a tender naïveté in the way this poetic effusion was received by the woman who never rejected the simplest soul, who knew just how to take the rhapsody of her old friend, especially at a moment when she was really most indifferent to the world's praise

<sup>34</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 29.

or blame. That Signor Gallo should have left such a deed upon record,<sup>35</sup> shows the more human side of the woman he so praised.

Another incident of her light-heartedness appeared a few years later, in the real hour of her death. She had been ill for some time. Finally her physician, Dr. Gardoni, despaired of her recovery, so prayers for the "Holy Mother Suor Angela" were publicly requested in the Cathedral, at High Mass. A young relative of hers from Salò, happening to be present, hurried in alarm to her apartment to see how Angela really was. To his amazement, he found the dying woman up and washing her head.<sup>36</sup> It seemed she had managed to get rid of her attendants by insisting upon their going to church. Then, fully aware of her condition, she quietly arose and washed and dressed her poor body for the end, arraying her tottering self as best she could. The young man felt reassured that she was better, but she told him she knew her death was very near, and indeed, in a few hours it was all over. This gay little strategy was part of her holy modesty.

## IX

The austerities which she practised, she seemed never to expect from others. While she urged the practice of mortification, and laid down in her Rule the order of fasting, the severest penalty she is known to have imposed, in her society, is one day's fasting on bread and water, and this for a very serious offense.<sup>37</sup>

Giacomo Chizzola testified under oath that he had known her to go from one Sunday to the other without other food than the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>38</sup> She was accustomed to make this fast from time to time to obtain some special grace, or in expiation.

Tribesco, in his deposition, said that Angela told him how in her girlhood at home with her parents, she did all the fatiguing housework ordinarily done by women, like cooking, making bread, sifting flour, drawing water and carrying it: and that nevertheless, she ate nothing all week long, except as much bread as you could hold in the palm of your hand. He added that he remembered

<sup>35</sup> Dep. of A. Gallo, pp. 233 and 234, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Girelli, "La trovo in piedi, che stava lavandosi il capo."

<sup>37</sup> *5th Bequest*, Salvatori, p. 202.

<sup>38</sup> Deposition of Chizzola, Aug. 18, 1568, in Bertolotti, p. 230.



how "she made a gesture with her left hand over her right, to show me the quantity of bread she used to eat."<sup>39</sup>

The Brescians could not get over her scant meals: they loved good eating: to be a mere vegetarian seemed to them in itself bordering on the miraculous.

*"Flesh makes flesh,  
Wine makes blood,  
Water chills the legs,"*

*"Carne fa carne;  
Vino sangue;  
Acqua infracida le gambe,"*

was their old saying; and yet Angela's strict diet brought her, with very few illnesses, to a very reasonable age of sixty-five. But at the same time, for her Company she insisted that their Lady Governors impose privations upon themselves rather than let their daughters want for anything. "If you have not what is necessary for their comfort, have recourse to the Mother General," she wrote; and in extremity she directed them to plead for their daughters in the name of Angela Merici herself.<sup>40</sup>

## X

This woman, whose practical judgment was shaping a fundamental solution for the problems of her day, through whose mind went sweeping all the tides of life in Brescia, while life there was at its seething pitch, was a great mystic. Paradox as it may seem, she was a mystic, yet never was there an individual more part and parcel of her day, more apparently commonplace, more ordinary. Her career was so hidden, so humdrum in itself, that the old biographers found little to tell excepting of her great sanctity, her great influence, the wonders of her cult. Specific instances are lost to posterity in the radiance with which tradition immediately sur-

<sup>39</sup> Chizzola too added similar testimony: "I understand that she ate no meat except when she was not well; and furthermore, all through Lent she did not eat except on Sunday, when she ate merely fruit and vegetables." Bertolotti, p. 236.

<sup>40</sup> *4th Counsel*, Salvatori, p. 210.

rounded her name. Prince Luigi Gonzaga "had heard of her" before she came to Castiglione:<sup>41</sup> Duke Francesco Sforza "had heard of her" before he came to Brescia to consult her:<sup>42</sup> the Venetians "heard of her" and made so great ado about it that she was obliged to leave the city by night:<sup>43</sup> Pope Clement VII "had heard of her" so that he offered her the civic charities of Rome to superintend.<sup>44</sup> But what did these people hear? What was it that was repeated from mouth to mouth? Tremendous deeds? marvels? feats of miraculous power? Not at all.

We do not find that she wrought miracles. She seems simply to have prayed much, to have labored much among the needy, and to have possessed a personal influence super-added to the natural, that divine effluence, like a nimbus of spirituality, which holds for all men a fascination in spite of themselves. It seems to have been her special miracle in life, that she, the most unlikely by nature and circumstances, the least calculated in human judgment to become a shining mark, passed across the stage of life carrying a luminous trail, not behind her but with her!

The truth is, that the commonplace part of her existence has been effaced from the canvas by time's long wear and tear so that only the rare high-lights appear, the good, the admirable points. One can watch her purpose grow, by studying the changes in Brescia's civic life, but not so her character; for its weak points cannot be made clear. That a timid, unlettered, country girl of the middle class, bereaved of family and fortune, came to be famous by sheer force of personality, came to stand shoulder to shoulder with princes, the checkmates on the chess-board of her time, came to establish an institute, one of the boldest ever launched in the history of the Church, would seem to display a growth sufficiently remarkable; but still the reader would like to see something of the interior struggles which brought this about.

We know of only three of Angela's struggles, and these show not at all her weakness, but a remarkable strength instead. When she was a growing girl, she overcame temptations against her chastity.<sup>45</sup> When she was a grown woman, much idolized by the public,

<sup>41</sup> Salvatori, p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> Salvatori, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> Salvatori, pp. 34, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Salvatori, pp. 36, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *infra*, Ch. II.

she triumphed over her feminine love of admiration.<sup>46</sup> And later, when her project was ripe, she seemed to have unduly hesitated and procrastinated, since heavenly visitants reproached her for delay.<sup>47</sup> However, these three incidents, while showing her to be appealingly human, like the rest of us, display even more forcibly her exceptional strength, for the devil, it would seem, had to go so far as to appear in human shape<sup>48</sup> in order to make any impression upon her, either with vanity or impurity: and Saint Ursula, reproaching her delay, showed all Heaven in sympathy with her wonderful project.

Prayer was her life. It was the element in which she labored and taught. As a child, she used to steal out of bed and pray; or she loitered behind her companions to kneel under spreading boughs and pour out her youthful heart to her Creator. Here we have the real mystic, the real spiritual lover. All the biographers mention her habits of prayer. Among the relics she left behind was an old Office Book, thumb worn and significant. Hers was a familiar figure in the Churches, S. Francesco, St. Afra's, St. Barnabas, the Duomo, and later when she organized her Company, she would have them live lives of practical prayer, the method for which she took care to lay down.

She wished them to vision the Lord always before them at every moment; she would say:

"Thank Him for His glorious favor. . . . Implore Him to supply your lack. . . . Obey Jesus Christ in me — . . . Let Jesus Christ be their treasure, their friend."

She pointed out the insecurity of human resources: "Seek shelter and safety at the Feet of Our Lord," she said, advising always "common prayer at the Feet of Jesus Christ."

She taught her daughters to live with a courage based upon the unseen: "Undertake all for the glory of God and souls. . . . Submit to the Divine Will. . . . You will have with you the most holy Virgin, the Apostles, the angels, the saints." Her Counsels began with the words "May the grace and strength of the Holy

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *infra.*, Ch. VII.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *infra.*, Ch. VIII.

<sup>48</sup> Deposition of Gallo, Oct. 29, 1568, p. 231, Bertolotti.

Spirit be with you." She wished them to rely upon those secret promptings with which the soul of man is more familiar than with the voice of any human guide:

"Do among yourselves, by mutual agreement, what Charity and the Holy Ghost will inspire:"<sup>49</sup> and, regarding temporal necessities, "Provide for all as the Holy Ghost will inspire."

And she bade them rejoice, "If you are faithful to these and the other observances which the Holy Ghost will determine."<sup>50</sup>

Her own prayer, the only prayer of her own improvising which has come down to posterity, is given elsewhere, in her Rule. In prayer she lost herself; in prayer she found herself: but principally she found Him who was the life of her soul. And she died in ecstasy repeating His Name.

The things of this world she looked upon as passing. In her long life she came in contact with much that is joyous and rich and satisfying as such things do satisfy, but she warned her daughters that it is a "traitor world, where there is no repose nor content, nothing but empty dreams, hard labor, and things unhappy and harmful. (*Infelice e meschina.*)"<sup>51</sup>

A well-known personality and a hidden life: this, then, is her record. She is not a saint of miracles, not a Thaumaturgus, not a Golden-mouth! Her single wonder was that her life of union with God became so patent that it shone out like light in a lantern passing through the streets of Brescia on a dark night. Her one miracle was that she grew in goodness and that all of nature and all of grace that life and the Author of life had bestowed upon her, she wove into the materialization of one great thought, her life-thought, her gift to her city, to her people, to her age, to all ages.

It is from the testimony of Nazari<sup>52</sup> at her Beatification that we learn "she acquired such renown for her knowledge of Scriptures, that theologians and preachers and masters of the spiritual life consulted her, both *viva voce* and by letter, on the sense of obscure

<sup>49</sup> 9th Bequest.

<sup>50</sup> 11th Bequest.

<sup>51</sup> 5th Counsel, Salvatori, pp. 210, 211, 212.

<sup>52</sup> Relazione scritta nel 1560 da G. B. Nazari, MSS. Queriniane, D. VII, 20, in Bertolotti, *Storia*, p. 222. Also Deposition of G. Chizzola, Aug. 18, 1568, in Bertolotti, p. 230.



passages in the Psalms, the Prophets, the Apocalypse, and both Old and New Testaments. God placed upon her lips at times, such words, that it was not possible to doubt that she possessed a supernatural gift of prophecy." She was gifted from childhood with visions. A number of times she was seen by others to be carried out of herself in ecstasy.

Visions, ecstasies, tongues, prophecy — these were her manifest supernatural endowments; but the evidences of Angela's mysticism did not consist in a power which she herself exercised over the laws of nature, to suspend them at will. We do not read of birds alighting on her shoulder nor of the fishes listening to her on the shores of Lake Garda, neither of cures other than through the healing power of a woman's gentle ministrations at the sick bed; the evidences of her mysticism are such as burst forth from the intensity of a soul afire with the love of its Creator, drawn to its Last End like steel to the magnet, rapt in ecstasy at thought of Him, and tenuously united to Him by free choice of will. At such moments the Creator, all-loving, stoops and lifts to Himself the soul, while nature stands abashed. The Lord of the flesh is likewise Lord of the spirit. The magnetic influence of a character which is dominated by such sublime love is beyond all computation. It inevitably reveals itself.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE LIONESS SICK

#### I

IT was the place for Angela's work but it was not yet the time. Nor was the form quite clear to her. She had learned a few fundamentals that must be established; first, there must be no connection with the monastic institutions; her work must be free, unhampered by enclosure or entailed restrictions; then it must be devoted to the teaching of religious principles especially.

She would not take existing schools of any kind and merely super-add religious instruction. She must let the existing schools alone, and start out with a special religious teaching apart from whatever regular school was attended, and without definite form or location. It was not the time to establish these, no matter what the future might have in store. In fact, even in organizing a religious training, she could as yet attack only its preliminaries; she should perform all corporal works of mercy in order to approach the real problem which she anticipated.

This was because there were people of all ages around her in dire distress for enlightenment, and in order to reach her eventual starting-point, it was clear that her organization, of what form soever it might be, would have to proceed by way of a long term of remedial work. This attitude of mind in Angela is clear by the fact that she told them whatsoever else they did, whatsoever other work, they should make sure that their daughters taught Christian Doctrine. She feared lest in remedial work they might forget the real objective.

After she came to live in Brescia in 1516, she had eight long years during which her project progressed not at all except in the long processes of her mind. She soon became used to the unsettled condition of life in the city; a brief lull of peace after the Treaty

with the French in 1516, — then always soldiers and soldiers, “at inestimable expense,” billeted on the people and long trains of munition-wagons, provisions, subsidies, levied by Venice with great grumbling, albeit upon the open hand of the Brescian citizens; a chronic feeling of unrest. And in a few years, the same thing, war, all over again.

Small wonder that the feeling of unrest grew chronic. Small wonder that she in her quiet room at St. Barnabas had many an anxious mother to console, many a tear to wipe away. Domestic worries so affected the people that they were manifestly on edge, ready to accept any presage of calamity.<sup>1</sup> That great army of birds, for instance, coming out of the east, wheeling over the Piazza and the Martinengo palace, — seen later in Bergamo, and again in Milan, those very same birds! — and fighting in mid-air, — what were they but omen of the Turks coming to overrun Italy?

In the little commune of Brescia Angela saw the schools close down one by one; she watched the courage with which the Brescian women rose to the occasion, true to the traditions of industry and stern patriotism<sup>2</sup> which passed into brawn and bone of their young daughters; she trembled with many a mother over the fate of her girls when the Imperial armies from Germany crossed the Brescian district, horse and foot, and the dreaded Swiss Lanzinechs, hired soldiery, detested of all, kicked up their heels in the wine-shops.

Things went from bad to worse. Angela grieved that it was not so much actual war, as poverty pinching them now. By 1526 crowds were actually gathering under the Podesta's palace, crying for help. “With my own eyes,” writes a contemporary, “I saw fifty people or more, all crying mercy at the Podesta's palace, which was shut, I think, on purpose; and the country was full of people going around begging, and I never saw them myself that I did not marvel how they could manage not to drop from weakness, they

<sup>1</sup> Marin Sanuto, *Diarii*, date June 11, 1522. Venezia, 1702.

<sup>2</sup> Bracciolino in his *Chronicle* tells of the women's valor, — besmirched with mud, at a critical moment, relieving the desperate weary men, repressing the enemy. “Not grief for their sons or brothers, fighting or wounded, averted them from the guard and defense of the city itself.” Quoted by Odorici, *op. cit.*

were so emaciated.”<sup>3</sup> Yet no one could get help either with or without money; no wheat, nor flour, nor bread could be sold anywhere without license. “It was heart-breaking!” he goes on.

The following year, in June, Nassino wrote in his Diary that there was no bread to be had in the town; so, there was set up a municipal bakery in the Piazza Nuovo with a bread-line of people. Next Spring it was worse still; the Podesta reported:

“As all the Riviera da Salò is taking refuge in this city, I have ordered that no one can enter without bringing wheat for his living.”<sup>4</sup>

It is not very likely that Angela and Hippolyta Gallo did not have to stand many a day in the bread-line with the rest. Then one day, — such discontent, such secret seditious meetings there were! — she heard that her own friend, Dr. Zanetti, had been accused of writing the scandalous lampoon in Latin rhyme which had been discovered fastened to the door of the Venetian Procurator, and that a thousand ducats was the price set upon his head! “Beware the wrath of the city Council!” He lived, however, to write Angela’s epitaph.

Thus, Brescia the Lioness of Italy was become a very sick lion, indeed. Angela had plenty to busy her and little time or inclination to forecast what the future might bring to her. The plucky commune was not to yield to disintegration, however, without a very protracted struggle; her left hand emptied as her right hand filled. Not quite yet was the sleep of centuries to dim her eyes.<sup>5</sup>

## II

To Angela as to any thinking person it would seem that of all sufferers from the lawlessness of the times, the young Brescian

<sup>3</sup> Zanelli, quoting a copy of a letter from Graziado di Colli, a Brescian, *op cit.*; see also Sanuto, Vol. VI, Col. 351.

<sup>4</sup> Zanelli, *La devozione di Brescia*, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Odorici preserves a lament of Casario over the city of Brescia: “How abject your aristocrats who used to parade the streets with retinues of servants, now despoiled, ashamed; noble matrons who used to be borne to churches, theatres, amusements, now dressed in mean and cheap cloth, alone, content with one waiting-woman; the multitude of merchants who flocked to you as to a central market, turn elsewhere; the mechanical arts with which you abounded, corrupt; you are become an abode of foreigners.” *Op. cit.*, IX, 115.



maiden was the most hapless victim. Angela knew that as a girl, she held no recognized place in society: as a minor, she was at the beck of her guardians: as a value in the marriage market, she suffered, in the general dearth of money, for her requisite dower: and as an intelligent being, the world at large was only beginning to recognize her right to any beyond the crudest education. To a mind like Angela's, whose subconscious thoughts had been playing upon this subject for years, there were certain elements in the economic condition of Brescia at that time which could not fail to yield food for serious consideration.

The victimizing of the young girl, either rich or poor, was very clearly illustrated by an incident which scandalised Angela and her friends the Patengolas early in April, 1518, when as Sanuto sets down,<sup>6</sup> loud complaints were made to the Podesta, that Count Camillo Martinengo had gone with a band of men and actually stolen away from her mother, for one of his brothers, a rich girl of the Cavrioli family, the latter having promised the child at ten to a step-son of the Averoldi, into which family the mother herself had recently married. The Martinenghi party put the child in care of some of their own blood in a certain monastery, but the Podesta lost no time in taking her out and changing to one of his own choosing, while he appealed to the Venetian Signoria.

The trial, says Sanuto, proceeded "secretissima," no doubt on account of the high lineage of the offenders: the wily Venetian goes on to note that the affair is more complicated by the girl's fiancé being related to the Papal Legate, a very prominent man, Altobello Averoldo! However, Venice came down upon the culprits inexorably, ordering fines and imprisonments, with the release of the poor little girl, and the Martinenghi, of whom there were four or five in the escapade, were still struggling with the hand of the law, as late as 1530, according to Sanuto. Young Juliano di Averoldi, who belonged to a faction in Brescia, showed his wild young blood by getting up a band of swashbucklers and riding out over the countryside in triumph, as far as Ferrara, where the Legate could see them, ridiculing and denouncing the house of Martinengo! Town-talk in its day, it played its part upon Angela's mind.

<sup>6</sup> Saunto, April 8, 1518.

The question of a girl's marriage dower was, of all problems, perhaps the most important at the time, and the least satisfactorily solved. In the era of the Renaissance the dower lay at the basis of family and social life; it brought up many of the famous complications with the Jewish usurers, and led to more legislation and head-scratching than perhaps any other question. It was a serious source of immorality: girls became neglected outcasts as Laura Mignani would have told you, because there was not enough money in the family coffers to marry them off.

No one knew better than Angela's friends the persistent struggle that Brescia had made with the evil element of social life, discriminated against, banished, restored, liberated, banished again, and the wheel turning round once more. Into this field of Brescian history, it is no part of our purpose to enter; our object is to show the place in it which Angela Merici occupied, her opinions, and the part she took.

To save poor dowerless girls from being sucked into the moral vortex, the state had to devise some sort of system for the loaning of dower-money, and here it stood face to face with the problem of usury and the Jews. The Monte di Pietà which they had set up during Angela's girlhood in order to provide dowers for poor girls formed to her way of thinking one of the most valuable of social expedients. She associated it fondly with the thought of the Franciscan friars who had persuaded the city council to set it up and for whose popularity in Brescia it was largely responsible, especially among the less fortunate class.

Angela as a Catholic was well informed of the gradual change in the Church's attitude towards money-lending; she knew how the old idea that the money of a lender passed altogether out of his possession without any compensation, and that it was therefore immoral to demand interest, was in her day gradually giving way to the stress of more practical views.<sup>7</sup> She may not have understood technically how the ancient system of feudal economy which denied the legitimate productivity of money, attributing it to land alone, had passed away; nor that the moralists and canonists of the Middle Ages had not absolutely affirmed the unproductivity

<sup>7</sup> Dews, *History of Economics*, p. 90.

of money,<sup>8</sup> limiting themselves to the mutual agreement "Mutuum date nihil inde sperantes." She may have heard that Innocent IV admitted that that only is usury which exceeds the bounds of what is legitimate interest. The old order had yielded to the new by the time of the Mericis, for money was considered a "res," a thing with serviceable value of its own, which combined with labor and industry, she knew was recognized as one of the economic bases of society.

But what she did know very well, and what is to us to-day like the old jangling of a worn-out chime, was the contemporary feeling against the Jews which colored Brescian life intensely, and for centuries back. Shortly before her birth it was, in spite of the support which Venice consistently gave the Jews, that a great wave of bitterness against them swept over Brescian society apparently springing out of religious intolerance and dread of false teachings, but at bottom, it was more or less on account of the economic principle, desire of money, of which the Brescians accused the Jews of possessing the monopoly.<sup>9</sup>

From the point of view of religion, this was to the people of Europe, still and always, the race that nailed the Son of God to the Cross and rejected the message of the Messiah. She must have heard the preaching of the Friars Minor in Lent and Advent, denouncing the prevailing vice of usury and extortion, which bore its own share in sustaining the feeling against the Jewish money lenders. Everybody knew that the Venetian government, with lynx eye upon the commercial prosperity of the state at large, sent orders to stop the persecution, threatened heavy penalties and especially against the preachers and quacks who prevailed upon the crowd.

Often and often the tale was retold in her hearing, how, at the moment when feeling was deepest the Brescian municipality found themselves at wits' end to save their dowerless girls; how the

<sup>8</sup> Review of Salvioni's *Dottrina dell'Usura*, 1905, by G. D. A., in *Arch. Stor. Italiano*, 1907.

<sup>9</sup> Zanelli, *op. cit.*; in 1477 came a new decree denouncing anti-Semitism and upholding the Jews' rights to tranquil living and to the practice of usury within certain limits; the decree affirmed the will of the Senate to be "that Religious preach the Word of God and exalt the Catholic Faith; and that they persuade infidels to accept it; that they condemn sin and vice, instead of stirring up rancor and trouble."

public conscience was disturbed, until finally the Council of Brescia began to consider the convenience of allowing the boycotted Jews the legal right to lend money in Brescia. But as it was contrary to Canon Law at the time to support Jewish usury and the good townsmen did not care about incurring excommunication they sent the Rectors of Sant' Agatha and San Lorenzo to refer to the College of Judges the question whether this could be done without sin. For usury had now grown to the rate of eighty per cent a year! They begged the Doge to have his ambassadors ask the Pope's permission<sup>10</sup> to introduce the Jews into their city as a *remedy* against *usurers, because the Christian usurers were themselves more exorbitant in their exactions than were the Hebrews!* It was, indeed, hard upon the grit of the thrifty Brescians, this thing of having the Jews get ahead of them financially; and with thrift and religious fire about equally balanced in their temperament, Angela's townspeople had shut their gates upon a race whose genius for money they were, in this crisis, ready and eager to make use of, forsooth, as protection against their very own. "Yes," said the Brescian, reversing the situation, "let us buy with them, sell with them, talk with them, walk with them, but not eat, drink, nor pray with them, — never!"

### III

Angela knew perfectly well that the city owed to the Friars Minor its final expedient against the prostitution of poor young girls; she felt a certain right of protectorate growing up in her own life, and hence her special interest. — From her girlhood this was a familiar thing, for the machinery of the Monte was well in motion, some citizens having been appointed to collect the capital, with a salaried steward and notary in charge, while money, to the sum of three ducats (in mediaeval value) per family was loaned out for six months at a pledge of one third the sum loaned.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Monte di Pietà*; see Pastor, Vol. VIII, p. 397: "In the Lateran Council Pope Leo X sanctioned the Monte to protect the poor; the payment of interest was pronounced permissible in theory."

<sup>11</sup> Paolo Correr, Podesta, reported to Venice: "About 20,000 ducats is loaned out by a steward on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, to any one in the city or province who needs it, or even to an outsider. They give money on any pledge



Still, the remedy was not sufficient and its shortcomings were emphasized by the existence of several other devices for providing marriage portions. She knew that the Hospital Grande, for example, looked out for a certain number of poor girls up to the age of sixteen; the girls married off, some with more, some with less dower. Brescia was in this way trying to do its share for orphan girls, providing them up to the age of twelve with teachers.<sup>12</sup>

That Angela Merici had to grapple personally with this difficult question of dowers is clear from the contents of Paul III's Bull, which awaits consideration.<sup>13</sup> If her institute should remain unclastered, what was to be settled about a girl's dower? If she entered a monastery she took with her at least a trifling dower; if she married, she must have a large portion. But if the members of Angela's teaching body were to do neither, what then? What of their legacies and inheritances? What of the thousand entanglements in the law regarding devolutions to charitable institutes which were to follow if the testator's exact intentions were to be frustrated by this new idea of an unmarried society?

This was a thought to give Angela pause. How was she to organize young girls safely? How provide a new social status that would be able to work freely? It seemed as though she must strike at the root of both Church and society in order to carry out her Teaching Idea.

Again, when she made up her mind to work for the moral education of girls, in order to offset the evils of society, this thing of their being driven into bad conduct by the force of their domestic circumstances, must have confronted her from the first.

"Why, we have not money; we cannot get married! What else is for us . . . ?" would be the first defense they would make.

The fact is, the municipality knew it very well. The municipality

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equivalent to the sum of five scudi and no more, without interest. Six Conservatori are appointed by the city Council to keep account of everything in the Monte, and they are obliged each year to invest about 3000 ducats in provisions at harvest time, at the best possible bargain, to dispense to the poor of the city, at cost price." Zanelli, *La devozione, op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> The city statutes are certainly full of intelligent legislation; had not the clutches of municipal bankruptcy and actual hunger been at the town's throat, a fair régime of social order might have existed.

<sup>13</sup> Bull of Approbation, see Chap. IX.

found itself obliged to urge marriages, to bribe people to get married! The laws set themselves to work to cut down excessive dowers, statute upon statute, — this, in high society, a measure Angela would take strong ground in favor of, inasmuch as she knew the kind of girls she was most anxious about came of people who affected everything which the upper class did.<sup>14</sup> Time and again had she heard people denouncing the extravagant weddings of the day as actually responsible for rarity of marriages. Angela was in sympathy with the entire policy of the municipality who legislated in Sumptuary Laws to curtail wedding festivities from wines even to the number of stockings the bride might have in her trousseau. There seemed no other expedient at the time. Those were long hours and long days for the doughty city councillors. But all the towns were doing it!

Angela could listen without the flicker of a smile when they told her that marriage-brokers were to receive from the commune a gold florin per cent in each marriage engaged and concluded by them! She was a child of her age. Had she not been used, all her life, to Brescia's public patented Agency of Marriage? It was begun in her infancy. To minds like hers, to eyes that saw what she saw, there was not much humor in a situation that would seem to us a good joke forever. For the city council was charged to elect a citizen for each quarter of Brescia, some one suited to the business, who was to introduce people and to make marriages among the townfolk with all solicitude and wisdom, and to see that they received the Sacrament of Matrimony. They were diligently to search out, work up, and make contract for, as many marriages as possible in their own quarter, and in all the city of Brescia.<sup>15</sup> And although they might not make any such request, still by virtue of their office, if they furthered the binding of any marriage contract, they were to have an innocent graft of a ducat apiece! The merry-hearted Brescians must have been indeed in earnest and in straits, when they set down that bit of matter-of-fact upon their statute books.

<sup>14</sup> Molmenti says the opinion that the dower influenced the marriage question seriously was universal, as is shown in contemporary laws of all the Italian districts, *op. cit.*, pp. 181, 188.

<sup>15</sup> See Zanelli on Cassa, *Funerali pompe conviti*, reviewed in *Arch. Veneto*, 1889. Also, Verga; *Le leggi suntuarie Milanese*, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, March, 1898.

There were many who shook their heads and opined that it was the fault of the women. And never was beauty held in higher esteem, nor was it more celebrated in painting, if not, perhaps, in poetry. Flattery certainly was doing its share in handing the sop to worldliness. But at least some women of Angela's co-townpeople were strong-minded enough to redeem their sex: "But were we born to admire our charms in this slavish devotion to the mirror?" protested Madonna Ceretae, in her letter of indignation; "was it for this we renounced in Baptism, the world with all its pomp and show?"

Angela knew her age, when she anticipated in her Counsels that her young aspirants might be attached to the vanity of an attractive head-dress,<sup>16</sup> for from Laura Ceretae's Letters may be gathered what allurements the fashionable luxuries held for the Brescian girl.

"Let those who doubt, go into our churches; there they will see young women sitting idly watching the weddings. One has on her head a veritable tower of false hair . . . another drapes her wavy locks about her shoulders; another fastens her auburn tresses with the finest gold . . . one rich necklace is worn on the breast, another suspended from the arm, while sometimes the throat is bound up in a mesh of pearls . . . yonder is a girl wearing a loosened girdle, so that she may be able to take fancy steps. . . . They sit haughtily apart from the common people; they fritter away whole estates in their passionate eagerness for fashion." . . .<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps it was difficult for Italian women of the sixteenth century to conceive of a costume totally devoid of color. There are some quaint passages in the early manuscripts of the Ursuline Order which might seem to mirror the view-point of the gay Brescians.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Testament, 6th Bequest*, Salvatori, 202.

<sup>17</sup> *Epistolae, Laura Ceretae, Brixienensis*: ed. Tomasino. Pavii, 1640. Epist. XXXI, contra muliebrem cultum. Imprecatio, p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> In an early edition of the Rule it says: "In order to practice simplicity in all things as becomes a Christian virgin, their stockings shall be only white, yellow, or pink, not brilliant colors! (*Jaune ou aurore!*)" See Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I.

## IV

The dower and the convent! that was another subject of Angela's meditations.

Luxurious weddings had found counterpart as she often deplored, in the elaboration of ceremonial at the convents, the distracted Sumptuary Legislators being obliged to limit the number of young women who might serve as attendants upon the novice at her formal Clothing.<sup>19</sup> Indisputably, the spirit of the age affected the monastic houses to greater or less degree, which in turn would react again for the worse upon society.

Pompeo Molmenti blames the customs of the Italians, by which, very frequently, on account of a missing dower suitable to an exalted marriage, dowers averaging from three to ten thousand ducats, girls were often forced into the convent. He cites popular songs which show nuns cloistered against their will, the motive being almost invariably, a daughter repugnant to cloister because her heart is engaged. In one song of the day, a mother urges the girl to eschew matrimonial sorrows in order to serve God: but the daughter proves deaf to counsel because the mother herself had married twice!

The status of the monasteries in Brescia could not fail to affect Angela's projected institute for the benefit of Brescian girls; it was not entirely without historical reason that her mind took the trend toward an uncloistered society of women. The fifteenth century seems to contain a long and detailed arraignment of European Catholic society on this subject; and the numerous appeals which Sanuto records as made by the archbishop of Venice to the Council of Ten show what a source of anxiety it was to the Church. Although the documents in the archives of the Council of Ten, relating to the Venetian monasteries have been destroyed,<sup>20</sup> those of the "Provveditori sopra Monasterii" contain twenty volumes of trials sufficiently illuminative of the prevailing disorder. Nor did the troubles cease with the opening of the sixteenth century, for while Angela was working in Brescia, the Venetian Republic once

<sup>19</sup> Verga, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Molmenti, *History of Venice*, Pt. II, p. 227.



more legislated "severe penalties for carrying off nuns from their convent."<sup>21</sup>

But in reading history it must be borne in mind that as the Humanists found in the virginal life of the cloister the hardest rock of resistance against their new paganism, *their word on this subject must be weighed*, since they would naturally make the convents the butt of their bitterest invectives, their most hostile enmity.

The fact is, we know now what Angela's country was at the time, realizing, namely, the apathy and spiritual degeneration resultant upon the western Schism, into which, for half a century, the strife of the Avignon anti-pope against the real Pope at Rome had plunged all of Europe, with an allegiance divided, and the door opened to all the moral disorders that fatten upon a doubtful authority,—disorders from which it took Catholic Europe fully a hundred years to rouse itself.

Angela's eyes were never closed to actual conditions. She had a frank, open mind. This is very evident in her writings.

She was not ignorant of the dark experiences which Brescia herself had been through,—was still going through. She had been in the city only a year when in July, and again in October, 1517, the municipal council were troubling their heads trying to quell the disturbances in monastic affairs. The municipality in her day was expected to protect the law of the Church. It seems there were two sources of the disturbances, each of which, arising from radical family customs, seemed almost beyond remedy at the time: one, from the discontent of dowerless girls who had entered monastic life, without a religious vocation, although these were the exception; the other, from meddling outsiders, against whom the grilles of mediaeval convents had, manifestly, to be erected.

One of the statutes is sufficient to show the lawlessness so familiar to her day, as well as the predicament that had to be faced.<sup>22</sup> "Any one who climbs into a monastery (scales the walls) shall receive 4 strappados, 400 ducats fine, and 4 years in prison. . . ."

<sup>21</sup> Sanuto, Vol. XXV, p. 351, quoted by Molmenti, p. 226.

<sup>22</sup> A. Cassa, *Monasteri di Brescia e le Monache del convento di S. Caterina*; in *Commentari dell' Ateneo di Brescia*, 1900, quoting Statute V, 1528, Priv. R. Carte, 239.

The same for "any one who, without leave, shall take any nun outside the aforesaid monastery, or any one who shall dare to threaten, or cause to be threatened, or say any abusive thing, or do any injury to any one of the superiors who have charge of said monasteries . . . or to the Deputies of the city against the good order of said monastery. . . ." <sup>23</sup>

It was plain enough to Angela and her contemporaries that the monastic authorities were struggling to uphold their rights to peace and the practice of the higher life; but the fact that the municipality was hard put to it to protect the communities, against conspirators who, will you nil you, were dragging girls out of cloisters, argues a reason existing in the society of that day, forcible enough to explain the situation, and deep enough to disturb the whole social order. This state of things will demand further elucidation in our pages. It was a state of things, deplorable indeed, but one quite familiar to her.

What could she behold in her own horizon that might impel her to wish to establish her new institute inside the cloister? And she, who was thinking of sending young girls down the highroad of the future in guise of ministering angels, how was she to thread her way out of the difficulties that prevailed in a country at war. No opening within the cloister, no prospect outside it!

The young girl was certainly the problem of the day. Angela lived to witness the tragic sequel to the rape of the beautiful daughter of Mariana degli Averoldi. It had been thirteen years from start to finish. The Brescians were holding a gorgeous tournament in honor of Alessandro Medici and his bride, when the city was stirred to its depth by a sudden tilt between the same two factions Carlo Averoldo and Giulio dei Martinenghi. Backed up by their adherents, they assailed each other in sudden wrath, the young Martinengo falling dead. The air was suddenly charged with ill augur of more blood to flow, says the old chronicler, for the Martinenghi could never forget how Altobello Averoldo, as Legate under Leo X, had influenced the Venetian republic against the house of Martinengo, in the case of that lovely girl. "The ferocious spectacle saddening the city for two years; for Scipio Martinengo,

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*. . . . quoting Statute V, 1529, Priv. G. P. 329t. and 1552H.H.f. 245.

with sixteen partisans, was attacked later by Gerolamo Martinengo, with a band of forty helmeted retainers, and stricken down in the Brescian public street. Unhappy mother! she had seen her husband led out to execution after the affair of the League of Cambray, and then the deaths of three of her sons, Luigi, killed by Paolo Nassino, Giulio, by Carlo Averoldo, and now Scipio, by his own cousin Gerolamo! Gerolamo was banished; but the law proved impotent against the root of the evil, the miserable domestic feud, for not a year later, Bartolomeo Martinengo, who had assassinated Valerio Paitone, was killed in his turn, on the steps of the municipal palace near the fountain.”<sup>24</sup> And all this was in the cause of one pitiful little girl.

## V

The witchcraft scandal in Valcamonica and the other Brescian valleys between the years 1516 and 1524, the year in which Angela went to the Holy Land, was certainly one more of the influences that moved her to a new departure in education; and beyond all doubt it was the inspiring motive for many of the admonitions subsequently set down in her Book of Counsels. The air was tingling with it during those first years. It was not definite religious convictions of a false flavor that seemed most to disturb the people at that time, but the subtle, trivial and ridiculous arts of necromancy; into such a state had the popular fancy been brought by a century's persecutions against dabblers in mystery, that, true to the irony of life, witchcraft became accepted as a matter of course.

What brought the movement home to Angela with a shock was, that the young girls of the Brescian valleys all around her, the young girls she was yearning over, were, in their ignorance, their youthful heedlessness, their lack of right instruction and protection, being caught in the mad whirl of the popular craze and exploited for all they were worth. With them, curiosity and fun led to rashness, rashness and ignorance to evil, evil to ruin. In following the bent of Angela's mind, one can easily imagine the disgust and horror with which she and her friends heard these wild stories repeated from mouth to mouth.

<sup>24</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX.

It is astonishing to read the transcriptions made of the witchcraft stories by notable gentlemen, contemporaries, supposed to have their wits about them. Was Antonio Romano, Angela's friend, one of those to whom Dr. Alessandro Pompejo of Brescia gravely asserted the week following the burning of the witches, that these people changed sticks into horses on which they went by night to France and through Spain saluting their friends, and that at Tonale in Valcamonica two thousand witches were sometimes caught performing their incantations? Angela felt the air charged with such tales as that of Carlo Miani how young girls, instigated by their own mothers, made a cross on the ground, spit upon it, trampled upon it, and behold, there appeared a noble horse on whom, mounted with a demon-groom, they found themselves in a trice on the summit of Tonale where there was dancing and banqueting, and a king who commanded them to insult the Cross, giving in reward a beautiful youth as escort! <sup>25</sup> Fancy the pretty girls of Valcamonica, unlettered and unlearned, swallowing down such wild fiction! Fancy the sequel!

The matter certainly brought to Angela a revulsion of feeling that swayed her powerfully towards the pitiful apostolate of her own sex.

Angela lived in the heyday of the Inquisitorial proceedings which the sorcery movement greatly intensified. It was during her lifetime that all the great cases "In Causis Fidei" were docketed within the pigeon-holes at Milan, the Inquisitorial centre, whither all documents had to be sent. She was perfectly familiar with the attitude of the Church towards superstition and the abusive applications of astrology, cabalistic speculation, and especially witchcraft and charms. She knew very well, and every intelligent Brescian woman knew why the Church condemned them. <sup>26</sup> She often saw the sentences against malefactors nailed on the church doors. There she read of such offences as compacts with demons signed in

<sup>25</sup> Odorici: *Codice diplomatico Bresciano*, in *Storie Bresciane*, Vol. VIII, 164, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Luigi Fumi *L'Inquisizione e lo stato di Milano*, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, March, 1910, devotes some fifty pages to the action of the Holy Office towards the sorcery movement throughout northern Italy, as it existed in Angela's day and after. The Visitation of San Carlo Borromeo to Brescia and its valleys, given in *Brixia Sacra*, July-Sept., 1910, supplies the sequel to the movement.





VIEW OF LAKE GARDA AT SALÒ



a person's own blood, promising to serve the devil, to pay him honors, to adore him, offering him one's own or another's soul: renouncing the Christian faith: outraging the Cross or the Eucharist on condition that the demon in his turn satisfy certain desires of the culprit. There was an offensive obscurity in the observances: the participants used characters and words unknown in any language, introduced Sacraments and sacramentals, chanted benedictions out of the Scriptures, made suffumigations with incense, offered up their own blood or that of animals, elicited diabolical aid in affairs of love, or else for the death of somebody, or perhaps to recover treasures: all of them acts which might be suspected of heresy, not only for the abuse of sacred things, and in a form of apostasy, but on account of compacts implicit or explicit with the devil.

All the trouble and turmoil aroused by the frequent clashings of the Inquisition and the secular arm was first-hand news to her generation; she heard the complaints from secular courts about doctors and quack sorcerers,—the patent-medicine clan of the Middle Ages,—cases of inconceivable subtlety; everybody understood that for the Inquisitors to handle such cases was to leap in the dark. The actual jurisdiction of the Inquisition began only from the moment there was evident proof of heresy and the sorcery cases plunged the courts into a muddle of infamy. Time and again the state tried to thrust upon the Inquisition responsibility for ecclesiastical discipline and morals, and there lay another rub. Many of Angela's acquaintances in the Brescian district served in the Croce-segnati, the lay confraternity,—noble, discreet, devout Catholic men, all voted in,—who, dispersed throughout the province, helped the Holy Office protect lay society, by delivering up to it troublesome offenders.<sup>27</sup>

## VI

There was a veritable epidemic of witch-burning in the Brescian district in 1518. With what distress and dismay did Angela, then at home in her Romano apartment, follow those dismal proceedings!

<sup>27</sup> Fumi, *op. cit.*

The Valcamonica affair reached a climax with about twenty-five hundred persons participating in its orgies. The judges sent summons for everybody who knew anything about it to come into Brescia and appear before the Inquisition. Hubbub in the streets! One woman was accused by twenty-four witnesses. Some of the most prominent names of the city were dragged into the evidence, and although the proceedings were secret, everybody knew the affair broadcast.

The case was the execution in Brescia, on July 17, 1518, of eight young women, mere girls, sentenced for witchcraft. The day preceding the execution, Frate Raymondo, special envoy of the Venetian Government, with some others, requested permission of the authorities to see these women, when he was told by the Inquisitor, "I do not wish them disturbed, because they have confessed, and they must not be upset."

"And I say," goes on the Frate's report, "that at the very time of their sentence, I saw these women, in my judgment truly repentent, commending themselves to God and the Blessed Virgin. And in my presence one of them said to the judge, 'You are doing me great wrong: you said you would let me go!' and nearly all of them declared that he promised to release them if they confessed. And I heard one of them say publicly, 'And I tell you not to blame Antonio Decus (and certain others); it is not true that they were seen on Monte Tonale: I was forced to say that, and I tell you so as to clear my conscience!'

"And I testify that I saw a spectacle of such cruelty during the burning of the said women, who were burned alive, that I went away overcome, because three or four of these women were dead, and reduced to ashes, before the fire touched the others.

"And I testify that I have heard publicly that excessive torments were applied beforehand to these women, and that fire was applied to a certain one in order to make her confess, in such wise that her feet were burned off.

"And I protest that such trials ought to be carried on only by men who are skilled in omens, and by theologians and canonists of good repute, and by God-fearing men, when the death of an individual is concerned." A repellant tale, certainly!



However, this Benvegnuda, known as Pucinella, although she was a mere girl of twenty-five, had been before the Inquisition once before. She had been once pardoned on the usual condition that she wear a "patientia" of silk with red crosses on it, and stand at the church door of the Duomo in Brescia to be seen penitent by all, and reject publicly all further communication with the devil. This she had failed to carry out, as everybody knew. The testimony was reported to Venice by F. Raymondo; how the witch had stupefied some and caused the death of others, and confessed to dancing with demons: how with a string in her hand and chanting incantations, she had cured the sick: how she invoked the spirits by name of men who had died evil deaths: how she confessed in other wild and whirling words of doings done on Monte Tonale beyond the imagination to conceive, but with power to chill even the chilly atmosphere of an Inquisitorial court and "make each several hair to stand on end." What a thrill pervaded the court room when she related how who but His Magnificence, the Podesta himself, had sent for her upon a time to cure one of his daughters of a malady! and with what shivers running down their backs they listened to the witch's incantation, with its weird rhythms:

*Dio fe sì,  
Dio fe Zoan Francesco,  
Dio Fe el legno de la Santa Cros,  
Dio me guardi de li sete dolori:* <sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Fragments of Gaelic thought had filtered into northern Italy long before the days of Dante, to whom scholars attribute Celtic influences: there seems to be a curious likeness in the incantation of these mountain-witches to an ancient Gaelic prayer in the collection *Paidreacha Na Daoine* of Charlotte Dease:

*Seven prayers seven times said  
Mary put to her Son,  
Brigid put beneath her mantle,  
Michael put beneath his shield,  
God put beneath His strength,  
Between me and the water that would smother me,  
Between me and the water that would drown me,  
Between me and sudden death,  
Between me and the wind of the hills,  
Between me and people's evil hearts,  
Between me and people's evil eyes,  
To shelter me, to save me,  
To defend me, to guard me. Amen.*

*Prayers of the Gael*, p. 38, by R. Mac Crocaigh.

*di fuocho ardente  
de acqua corrente  
de omo male faciente  
de ono possente più de mi,  
che in de l'andac in là sia  
con Dio e con la vergine Maria  
e con i santi soi.*

The forlorn creature, confessing to hideous wickedness, insisted that she had been taught by the devil, and when all was said, her judges seem to have believed it. She persisted before them in renouncing Baptism and the Christian faith. She was pronounced by the Inquisition to be a depraved heretic, stirring up the people, and was declared to be subject for the arm of the civil power. The sentence of the Inquisition was signed in an hospice belonging to the Dominican convent in Brescia "imploing clemency in her favor" from the secular arm.<sup>29</sup> The State ordered the public execution of Benvegnuda and her companions.

The effect of this tragedy upon Angela must have been tremendous. What an ineffaceable blot upon the memory! A walled town of some five thousand buildings, streets thronging with straggling soldiery and weeping women; wild excitement among the dregs of the population; guards everywhere; confusion of tongues amid dismay of Churchmen and statesmen; the hot July sultriness; and the dying faggots in the Piazza!

It was at such a price that the astute Republic of Venice discovered her mistake in loosely disburdening her shoulders of the witchcraft cases. Her own deputy to the trial prefaced his report by denouncing the injustice of the proceedings; and the Republic saw to it that in future, trials were conducted somewhat differently.<sup>30</sup>

The general feeling of the town did not subside until the passage

<sup>29</sup> *Processi di stregghi*, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, Sept., 1889, p. 625.

<sup>30</sup> In his account of the Gandini trial, Dr. Zanelli quotes from the Venetian State Archives (*Parte sugli eretici pressi in Cons. X die Mar. 21, 1521*); that trials in Brescia were to be carried on in future by the Podesta's court and four other Doctors to represent the arm of the State, after a commission of two bishops, and a Venetian Inquisitor of "unblemished doctrine, kindness, and integrity," and two Doctors of Brescia, had decided that the case was in reality Heresy.

of the Venetian statute of 1521 regulating the Brescian procedure, and until everybody was satisfied, and man and maid could read it affixed to the public square and ending with the following declaration: "It is their will, that the Apostolic Legate learn whether the love of gold is not sometimes the cause of the condemnation; and they wish it borne in mind, that these poor people of Valcamonica are a *simple people, not highly educated, and that they have more need of preachers and instruction in the Christian Faith*, than of persecutors." <sup>31</sup>

This must have been the final verdict of more than one sane-minded commentator within the walls of Brescia itself in those exciting days, of whom not the least, nor the least energetic in reacting to the experience, was Angela Merici, who soon began to set about her institute for the education of young girls. And one cannot but observe with regret and pity that in the Podesta's reports of Brescia, filed in Venetian pigeon-holes during those trying years, the one eleemosynary institution which they never seemed to mention, and which they never seemed to see the need of, was the insane asylum.

"For this miserable aberration of the human mind," says Rosa, wisely, "there must be found some origin other than sorcery. It was a seed of ancient Islamism mixed with a superstition of preceding centuries, and especially the sixteenth, when to our valley folk had filtrated the Protestantism, with which by 1527 several noble houses of our city had become infected." <sup>32</sup>

It is significant of the complexity of the times that Venice merely demanded the fine imposed by the commune upon such offenders, and the affair was left unpunished, because the nobility were implicated!

To be sure, every creed in the history of the world has burned its heretics, every nation has staked its witches, and the end is not yet; in the school of Christ there was no funeral-pyre for the neighbor; there was no Cross except for Himself. And the like is true in the school of the great religious founders. So Angela, in her

<sup>31</sup> "Che quei poveri di Val Camonica sono gente semplice et di pochissimo ingegno, e che avrebbero piu bisogno di predicatori e d'istruzione di persecutori." Odorici, *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> Odorici: *Codice diplomatio, op. cit.*, IX, 167, *seq.*

quiet apartment in Romano's house, led on by the light of the Holy Spirit, conceived the idea that these very young girls of Brescian valleys, whose influence was leading the whole commonwealth into wild depravity, could be made the leaders to quite the opposite order of things. This undowered damsel, for whom society found no definite place, might be made the very basis of a social regeneration.

## VII

The sorcery troubles ran on apace; there were other trials, others burned. And just as Angela in her reflections had passed the crisis of "What I might do!" into "What I must do!" a new civic trouble developed and brought all the iron nerve in her make-up, the mettle of her ancestors, to a fresh strain. This was the Lutheran invasion of her native land. The execution of a miserable renegade monk for witchcraft or sorcery had stirred up all the incipient rebels against the Church, and Angela, watching before the Blessed Sacrament at midnight, could hear their nocturnal processions disturbing the city streets, "fifty men and three priests," — says Nassino, — "shouting litanies and carrying an inverted crucifix." The people drowsily listening in their houses that night knew very well what these blasphemies portended. The execution of Frate Benedetto had roused the rebels against the Church to incite this hostile parade.<sup>33</sup> Scandalized, the city council betook themselves to discover the authors, but these had so intimidated possible informers, by pay and threats of hanging, that the hands of the magistracy were practically held.

And the following Sunday at the cathedral during High Mass, the air still full of excitement, and all the grandees present, — Podesta, Capitano, Inquisitors, — up gets the Carmelite Fra Pallavicino into the pulpit, — before Avogadri, the Patengolas, the Galli and the rest, listening with all their ears, — and he denounces the nocturnal processions and calls on the Brescian people, now violently divided in their sympathies, to pray that evils like the recent sack of Rome will not fall on their town too! Confusion worse confounded. His

<sup>33</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*



speech is found fault with, he is denounced to the Inquisition as savoring of heresy and it ends in his being forbidden to preach.<sup>34</sup>

Sanuto, who is a faithful mirror of his time, gives in graphic style the coming of the avalanche from the north, and in following his account of the story, one can feel something of the thrill that Angela and her people felt in this human drama where they were, perforce, to play their part.<sup>35</sup>

The ever vigilant diarist first notes, February 9th, 1520, how news has arrived at Venice through Spain, that a friar of St. Augustine, named "Mathio Luther," had written certain works against the Pope and the Church, and that the Pope had ordered an investigation. By June 9th, Martin Luther has a great following, the Duke of Saxony and others; by December 30th, twenty thousand people are of Luther's opinion, and it has been proved by Holy Scripture that "the Mass, according to the use it is put to, is a great sin to say it, and a great sin to hear it!"

By February, whole columns are devoted to the Luther scandal, and thus the movement grows. May 23, 1525, a Brescian sees the King of France in a certain castello, and "he could talk of nothing but Martin Luther." So by this time tongues are buzzing all around Angela. In the Fall of 1526 word arrives that the Emperor will come to Italy, because the Lutherans are growing, the Imperial cause is faring badly, and it is proposed to hold a new Council and reform the Church and quiet these Lutherans! In another year it is said that His Serene Highness (of France), speaking to one of the ambassadors who began to talk about Luther, exclaimed, "That will do! We have heard enough about that!"

One of the earliest notes of near alarm that passed by word of mouth from Milan to Brescia bringing grave misgivings to the little group of Angela's friends was sounded rather dramatically, as recounted by Jacobo da Cappel, reporting to the Venetian government:<sup>36</sup> "Your Excellency should know, that one day of this

<sup>34</sup> Luigi Fumi, *op. cit.*, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, June, 1910, devotes 80 pages to the Inquisition and the State in their attitude towards the Lutheran movement throughout the Lombard provinces; see also Zanelli, *Gabriele e Eracleo Gandini ed i Processi d'eresia in Brescia nel secolo XVI*, in *Arch. Stor. Italiano*, 1907.

<sup>35</sup> Sanuto *Diarii*, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Sanuto, *op. cit.*, May 25, 1526.

Paschal season a little before Vespers, six Lanzinech cavalrymen, handsomely clad, entered the church of San Marco, and ran all through the church, crying 'Luther! Luther!' There were about a hundred people in the church."

One feels as one reads the growing excitement and disturbance that Angela felt all about her, as she strove to keep her pulses quiet and go about her hospital service and other ministrations of charity.

At last, the near thunder breaks over the Brescian valleys. On October 29th, 1528, a report is sent into Venice from the Podesta of Brescia, enclosing a letter from the Capitano of Valcamonica, about the Lutheran Swiss soldiers passing through. Then, on the seventh of May, 1529, Sanuto notes:

"ITEM: How, in Saxony, Friar Martin Luther, who was married and had children, is dead"; nevertheless, the next month come tidings portentous enough to the effect that 24,000 Swiss infantry were on their way to Brescia — the very thing of all the Brescians most hated! — and that 19,000 of them were from Zurich, and these were Lutherans! It must have been like the crack of doom.

"On the other hand," continued the message, "the others, from Urania and Unterwald, good Christians, have written about the Lutherans, saying that we must prepare for war." Her Brescia was then to taste the horrors of religious war!

It was not astonishing to her that these soldiers brought dismay even to the Venetian Signoria, for well they knew and feared the immemorial sympathy between the valley people and the laboring classes in certain German districts. As everybody knew the frequent German invasions, with pestilence and famine, had some time previously determined the poor people of Valtrompia to emigrate to the mining regions of Germany whither the arms and the iron of Valtrompia had for generations been sent to find markets. Thence had arisen the Bulismo, a socialistic movement of unheard-of violence,<sup>37</sup> which the Venetian government had not succeeded in suppressing; and to the violence of the Buli protected by the small feudatories, such as Negroboni, Avogadri, and the like,

<sup>37</sup> Piotti, in *Brixia Sacra*, July, Sept., 1910; cf. also Cantù, *Gli Eretici d'Italia*, Vol. I, 392.

was soon united the religious fanaticism of Luther's adherents. The emigrant laborers brought from Germany to the valley the new religious and socialistic notions and this, together with the prevailing religious carelessness and the propaganda of certain ex-religious, who had embraced with ardor the Lutheran teachings, reduced the entire valley to a degree of spiritual and physical wretchedness and every sort of miserable crime. Conditions were worse here because the movement was largely economic.

## VIII

Yet the name Luther was not allowed open utterance from any pulpit, the Holy Office and the Podesta keeping constant surveillance over the preaching within the city. Defection throughout Lombardy did not arise from any general desire of breaking the traditional religious bonds with Rome. But what most dismayed Angela was that from the first the atmosphere all around Brescia was charged with a new and abominable license. This arose as her own final obstacle, like the fog of a murky fen, the last morass which she must cross on her way to the Jerusalem of her thought. In the midst of this dense confusion of uncertainties which lasted for years, she had to set her hand to the wheel and guide the young souls who confided themselves to her care. On every side were occurring what struck her judgment as the most disgusting defections; at Cremona, many;<sup>38</sup> in 1528 the Prior of the Dominicans there abandoned religion.<sup>39</sup> Mantua, they told her, was a nest of heretics.<sup>40</sup> In Bergamo, she heard, they were disputing publicly and proselytizing scandalously. Everywhere in the monasteries, Lutheran books caused much trouble. Monks, turned Lutheran, fled to Switzerland to evade the Inquisition, where one, Roncadello, dying at Geneva, left a legacy to be used for such religious fugitives. So hotly were the new doctrines discussed, that special restrictions had to be laid upon confessors and preachers. Confessors! That was the tocsin to Angela. What would she do with young women to look after?

<sup>38</sup> Fumi, *op. cit.*, 346, 354; Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, 176, quotes Nassino.

<sup>39</sup> Cesare Cantù, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 32-52. Also Fumi, *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> Battistella: *Alcuni documenti sul S. Ufficio in Lombardy*, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, March, 1895.

"Be on your guard," she wrote, "lest some confessor or other religious weaken their good sentiments either about fasting, or virginity, or other good things; for under pretence of good advice they manage to unsettle the minds of poor young girls and turn them away, contrary to their better judgment, from their good resolutions."

In her Rule she stipulated that the regular confessor that each of her daughters had was not to be changed without permission of the authorities in the Company.

One wild fellow, an Augustinian of Milan, clad in his habit, went wandering about teaching anti-Trinitarian doctrines, finally settling down in Valtellina near Brescia as an evangelical preacher, and soon the valley was teeming with pernicious ideas, both religious and secular teachers taking them up. Angela was glad when the Bishop, by Papal decree in 1534, was ordered to deprive such clerics of their Catholic benefices which they still clung to, deceiving the people: they were to be examined as to their doctrine and degraded from the ranks of the Church even, if necessary, to be consigned to the secular arm.

Against such wretched apostates Angela warned her ladies with emphasis:

"When you hear of some preacher or other person who has a reputation for heresy or for preaching new things foreign to the teachings of the Church or adverse to the Church, and when you find that your children are running the risk of hearing him, you must see that they shun him; lest he plant in their young minds bad seed which can hardly be rooted out. . . . For your own good it is better to follow that which is certain without danger than the uncertain with danger."

She saw the results of the innovation follow swift and sure: she saw Count Martinengo take up the new doctrines; she heard that Beatrice Fiamenga, of noble Brescian family, had left her husband, with great resultant scandal. If you were orthodox, you were ridiculed in satires and gay pasquinades which were the popular jests in ultra-fashionable circles.<sup>41</sup> Angela deplored the support of influential people bringing about such a distressing state of feeling.

"During these dangerous times," wrote she on one of those

<sup>41</sup> Cantù, *op. cit.*, III, 43. Also Fumi, *op. cit.*, pp. 375, 387.



stormy days, "you will find no recourse except to flee to the Feet of Jesus Christ who will govern and teach you!"

Like a sentinel on a hilltop, she viewed the dismal situation and called down to her gallant company: "Know, that you have to shield and defend your little sheep (*pecorelle*) from wolves and from thieves, — two kinds of dangerous people: namely, worldly, false religious with their errors, — and heretics."

To her mind there was no compromise to be made with false doctrine. One can see how all the stern stuff in the Brescian race stood up within her. The unswerving probity which she had inherited from her father, "John Merici, Notable of Desenzano," the clear vision that comes of an unblemished lineage, a pure stock, prompted her to take her stand for truth, in this miserable collapse. To appreciate what that avalanche of confusion must have been to right-minded Catholics of Europe such as she was, we must visualize every lawless revolt that lies between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, from Bolshevism back through the Reign of Terror, with all that each signified to the people to whom it was most appalling; and still, the Religious Revolution of the sixteenth century surpassed them all, because it was the first.

The unbridled license sprang from the new principle that every man should interpret Scripture unto himself. It was not at that time merely a question of enrolling oneself definitely under the banner of a new religion in modern fashion, for it must be remembered that the first of the denominational creeds, that of Melancthon for the Lutherans, was not drawn up until 1531; but this first stage was like opening a bag of pernicious feathers and letting them loose,<sup>42</sup> every wild idea conceivable about the old order of things, every possible distortion of tried and accepted principles in dogma and discipline,<sup>43</sup> was being bandied from lip to lip, and

<sup>42</sup> Fumi, *op. cit.*, pp. 336-348.

<sup>43</sup> During the 12th century, Arnold of Brescia introduced into Lombardy the politico-religious ideas of church and state and the Valdesi, the Paterini, and Catari followed. See Luigi Fumi: *L'Inquisizione Romana e lo stato di Milano*, pp. 64-70, March, 1910. The Catari held the dualistic idea; the Valdesi went further and claimed free preaching and poverty; they set the Bible above Patristic teaching and denied Purgatory and suffrages for the dead. The Arnaldisti affirmed that a sinful priest could not absolve. The Begari embraced free-thinking, accused the Papacy of thwarting liberty, and assuming the fundamental error of union with God, justified unlicensed freedom of pleasure. The Apostolici rejected marriage. All these ideas were now revived.

in every imaginable form ranging from earnest inquiry to ribald jest.

And still it must have been a comfort to her to think that in Italy the new doctrines were entirely the exception, for a great deal of steady religious feeling prevailed always among these people. The Sforzas in Milan, among whom was her friend Duke Francesco, had been careful to make use of this sentiment by encouraging throughout Lombardy all sorts of religious foundations and projects; they had urged the crusade against the Turks, and loyalty to the Holy See. It was but one putrid vein in the body corporate, this, running through Italian society.

Nor was it, as Angela well knew, that the Church had not realized the need of reform within the sanctuary itself, for Pope Julian had announced emphatically that the three main reasons for summoning a General Council were the avarice prevailing among the Cardinals, the general abuse of benefices and practice of simony, and the excess of magnificence and luxury in the Church. He urged a Council, "lest the wrath of God come upon us, and we be punished and not without grave danger and harm to the entire Church."

So it was in this reform movement that Angela's hopes were centred, reform arising at the very centre of authority and culminating later in the great house-cleaning of the Council of Trent. When the preparations for the Council began, nowhere was shown greater enthusiasm than throughout the Lombard district. The people made processions through the streets to implore "that the Almighty may deign to hear our prayer and that the Council may be concluded in favor of the Christian faith and the destruction of heresy." On each of the three days of the Triduum all the shops in Milan closed while the procession was passing by.

"These opinions that will arise," wrote Angela to her daughters, "let them go on and pay no attention to them; but pray, and have prayers said, that God will not abandon His Church, but will deign to reform it as He pleases for His honor and glory."

Such was the remedy which formed the basis of her hopes; and her teaching institute, if ever she could see her way to it, must form part of this great work. This was clear to her at last.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FIVE WONDER YEARS

#### I

IN 1524, after the witchcraft troubles had subsided and before the disturbance from Germany had developed into any serious consequences in Italy, Angela went to the Holy Land. The Turk, in whose grasp it lay like a coveted pearl, continued to play the part of the great ogre to the mediaeval imagination,—the nightmare of its dreams. When gossips of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had nothing else to talk about, they could always fall back upon the Crusade against the Turks, for it was an endless theme!

The Crusade was the dream of baffled hopes; the emprise of kings in their fits of good humor; the mellowed jest of the turbaned infidel, on his part.

In 1485 Innocent VII proclaimed a Crusade. Fifteen years later, Alexander VI proclaimed one; in 1506 Julius II was quite resolved; Adrian VI hoped to carry it out; <sup>1</sup> Charles VIII of France declared he was going to conquer Palestine but meantime he must seize Naples as a naval base: unhappily, having seen Naples once, Charles' ambitions died the death!

Meantime, the Turk found in the quarrels of Christian princes the *felix culpa* which favored his sinister advance as one by one the Christian strongholds of Europe fell before him. Lepanto, Durazzo, gave him the Adriatic, and Venice watched his night-fires only a stone's throw off. To the north he marched upon Poland; he overran the Balkans and took Belgrade in 1521, and went up and threatened Hungary. He captured the isle of Rhodes from the distraught Knights of St. John, whom European banality left to their fate; and at last he struck his blow at Venetian commerce, by

<sup>1</sup> Pastor, *History of the Popes*, Vols. V to XII.

seizing Alexandria.<sup>2</sup> It was reported in Rome that at the fall of Rhodes the cry of the Turks was "Italy! Italy! on to Rome!" Rumor had it that they were soon to land in Apulia. In vain did the Pope call upon Christian kings, he himself being embroiled in their internecine struggle.

For the time being nothing could be done: things must remain in *statu quo* between Christian and Turk, and conditions for Christian travellers in the Orient were anything but safe. Nevertheless, it was at this moment that Angela Merici made her visit to the Holy Land.

What more natural than that she, deterred by every obstacle which war and famine and confusion could present, should turn for consolation and light to this pilgrimage. One fine day, her cousin Bartolomeo Biancosi dropped in to see her, and to her surprise remarked that he believed he would like to go to the Holy Land. At once the two launched with enthusiasm upon what seemed at first a visionary project, but it ended with the young man's promising to take this favorite cousin along, and they pledged themselves gayly neither one to go without the other. Misgivings as to ways and means arose, however, when to their delight, Angela's old friend, Signor Romano, declared himself to be of a mind with them. They knew they were safe then, nothing easier than to go on the pilgrim ship the following Spring. However as it happened, news came that the ship was not to go; so Angela resigned herself with her usual sweetness. But Romano, who, in that event, proceeded to Venice to embark for the Fair at Lanciano in the province of Naples, whither his business was taking him, heard accidentally that the Pilgrim Ship would set sail in a few days. At once, Angela with Bartolomeo took to horse at Salò, and skirting the lake through Desenzano, Peschiera, Verona, Vicenza, and Padua, proceeded in haste to the port of San Marco.

Near Montebello they met with the first of their remarkable experiences, when a great torrent in Spring freshet blocked their way. The two travellers and their guide found no manner of crossing except on a rude log laid from one stone to another, and too narrow for any horse to pass over. Biancosi, young and courageous, riding a

<sup>2</sup> Vertot, *History of the Knights of Malta*, III, 161-251.



sure-footed animal, plunged his steed into the stream hoping to lead Angela's and inspire it with courage, but hers reared and plunged and refused to breast the water so that the guide shouted to her not to attempt the crossing. She could not go on and she would not turn back. There was nothing for it but to try the slender plank. A moment she paused to raise her heart to Heaven: her horse which had stood still, paralysed, now moved on of its own accord, and they saw her urge the trembling creature in mid-air over the narrow bridge with the torrent seething beneath her, where not even a brave man would care to trust himself on foot. This is the incident which the artist, Facchino, has so admirably treated; Angela dressed in the riding garb of the day, with dark, trailing skirts and full sleeves, is depicted in contour, her head thrown back and hands clasped, holding the reins of her noble white horse, that with bowed head is stepping gingerly along the plank over the narrow stream. Biancosi on the far side awaits her while in the foreground the guide expostulates. There is an aureola around the woman's head.

Next day all danger was forgot, as on the glorious Corpus Christi morning after Mass and Communion, the two cousins, with Romano, boarded the pilgrim Ship which stood swelling its great orange sails in the salt breeze, while all the bells of Venice were ringing, and all the people, under Senator Luigi Giustiniani as deputy, came crowding the wharves to see the pilgrims embark for Jerusalem, "Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" like the crusaders of old.

A long sail it was in those days from Venice to the Isle of Crete, at that time her subject island of seven years' standing, but no doubt, as is the manner of pilgrim ships to the present day, there were hours of common prayer on board with spiritual reading for all the company, and daily Mass, besides the periods of relaxation in the sunshine up on the deck. In this way, all on board had come to know the Brescian party. Angela was one of the first to see the port as they put in at Candia. Light of heart, eagerly looking to the goal of her life-long dreams, all things left behind and the Holy Sepulchre ahead, one can fancy her upon the windy deck, calling to her friends, "The port! The port! I see the port!"

## II

But it was a strange thing that befell. In a single moment, standing there, Angela was stricken blind. Her companions hurried to her in alarm: friends, the commander, the company, gathered about in consternation. Her sight was gone. And as the monstrous old ship drew straining into port, a gloom fell over the whole party. It was only too true: she was stark blind. Some said it was from the sea air, and some from the fatigue of the journey, the glare of the sun on the waters: others thought that it could be nothing but paralysis of the optic nerve which struck home without warning. But what mattered the cause now in face of the stern fact? And blind she remained. Biancosi and Romano, appalled, saw their own duty clearly enough. They were all for turning back.<sup>3</sup>

"Let us wait at Crete," they proposed, "until some vessel comes in, bound for Venice. Let the pilgrims go on to the Holy Land. We can get you back home in a very short time, and into the hands of the most skilled doctors in Venice."

But no, Angela would have none of such propositions. She considered that she was unworthy to look upon the Holy Places and that God had thus rebuked her. "Oh," she begged, "lead me by the hand! Take me by the hand. I shall be so happy to be near those holy spots, even without seeing them!"

Such speech and such courage gave the two men heart and they consented to go on with the pilgrims, although with misgivings. All confused as she was, practically alone, helpless, confronting every conceivable inconvenience, she showed a calmness of mind which astonished the entire shipboard.

"Why are you so troubled," she asked; "can you not understand how this blindness can be turned to the good of my soul?"

She was most anxious that their filial confidence in the Heavenly Father should not be shaken.

"I may not see the Holy Places with my eyes, but I shall touch them with my hands, and I can kiss them with my lips. And be-

<sup>3</sup> Sworn testimony of Agostino Gallo, Oct. 29, 1568, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 233; also sworn testimony of Antonio Romano himself, taken June 21, 1568, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 225.



ANGELA CROSSING THE TORRENT AT MONTEBELLO

*Adapted from a Painting by Facchino.*





sides," she added with that practical sense so natural to her, "how should I ever console myself, if I knew that I had prevented you both from completing your pilgrimage?"

So they had to let her reëmbark at Candia, the marvel of the ship in her patience and resignation, the idol of the ship in her Christian womanliness. Shortly after they landed on the coasts of Palestine where they took caravan for Jerusalem, and one sunset the Tertiaries of St. Francis on Mount Sion, in their gray old hospice, beheld a singular sight, when Antonio Romano and Bartolomeo Biancosi led by the hands between them, stumbling up the walk, this woman, with wide eyes, this Tertiary from Venice with her Franciscan cord, her simple white headgear and pilgrim staff, who told them she had come, blind, from the Isle of Crete, to visit and revere the Holy Places! <sup>4</sup>

At dawn the eager travellers were out on the terrace of the monastery which commanded a view of the whole city and its environs. The sun rose magnificently behind the Mount of Olives. In front was the church of the Holy Sepulchre and its lofty cupolas; farther off, the sight of the old temple of Solomon; on the right, the ancient palace of David. Romano and Biancosi, bending over the parapet, could not tire of gazing at those places and those monuments. They were eager to see the Via Dolorosa, eager to go down to the spot pointed out where Simon of Cyrene assisted Christ to carry his Cross. <sup>5</sup>

Angela declared that her painless affliction gave her deeper devotion. With what eagerness she knelt and kissed that soil once blest by the Divine Feet of the Son of God!

"O happy land!" she exclaimed, "happy land, that heard the first plaint of my Redeemer in the stable and His last sigh upon the Cross! His Feet trod these very roads! Here He spoke to the crowds! on the shore of this lake He called Peter and John!"

Every leaf, every breeze, every rock, recalled to her the Christian heritage of Divine Love! <sup>6</sup>

While the other pilgrims visited all the historic sites connected

<sup>4</sup> See Bertolotti, *Storia di S. A. Merici*, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> See Lamartine, *Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*, 1868, Vol. I, pp. 266-281.

<sup>6</sup> See Girelli, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

with Biblical saints of old she had to wait at home in the hospice. She had many hours in which to contemplate the appalling doom that seemed to have settled upon her. Could anything have so smitten across her life's purposes? Could anything so have brought home to her her utter loneliness in this world, her excruciating helplessness, and a future of absolute dependency upon others, the more overwhelming because to one who had spent all her years in relieving others. Tremendous reversal! Excepting when visiting the Holy Places, Angela remained at the hospice occupied in continual devout exercises, either meditating, or reciting prayers, and going on with the severe fasts and other corporal austerities to which she was so many years accustomed. This little group of nuns at the hospice where she stayed was held in high regard by the Saracens, and, young or old, they were always safe along the highways; no one dare molest them.<sup>7</sup> So pronounced was the impression which she made that her memory was kept among the Franciscans there for more than a century. They have mention of her in their chronicles of the Syrian Province, 1694, listed with the persons distinguished for holiness who had lodged at their hospice.<sup>8</sup>

However, four precious journeys she was able to make hand in hand with her two devoted guides, but over what strange stones, up what unfamiliar hillsides! To Faino, one of the most reliable of the early biographers, we owe certainty of the fact that she spent three months in Palestine,<sup>9</sup> during which time she was able to grope her way to the Grotto of Bethlehem, eight kilometers from Jerusalem; the oldest, most reliable manuscripts mention her visits to the crib, and say that she broke out in tears and extended her hands in her blindness, "as if she were embracing the little boy Baby and pressing Him to her heart."

Another time they took her to Gethsemane. You are obliged to cross the brook Cedron on the way to the Garden of the Agony, a garden enclosed by a low wall, a space of a hundred paces square

<sup>7</sup> See Bertolotti, p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> "Un' altra Serva di Dio nel medesimo tempo in Gerusalemme illustro grandemente il Monastero delle Monache Terziarie del Monte Sion, chiamanta Sant' Angela di Desenzano." Giovanni di Calorra, *Min. O. Storia Cron. della Provincia di Siria e Terra Santa di Gerusalemme*. Venice, 1694, lib. 5, Chap. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 21.

and containing eight olive trees of remarkable size and of such visible antiquity that one might well believe they existed at the time of Christ, the more so as Greek, Armenian and even Arab approached them with respect. In the grotto in which Jesus prayed, a sort of vault supported by rocky pilasters, with light entering through an aperture in the top, she found an altar where there was an inscription "Hic factus est sudor ejus sicut guttae sanguinis decurrentes in terram."

Again to Calvary she found her way, and at last to the place where once they laid the body of Christ. Of her visit to the Holy Sepulchre,<sup>10</sup> Salvatori relates how, "With a loud voice she confessed herself guilty of the Passion and Death of the good Jesus. Her crying and praying in that narrow sanctuary were so intense that in the end she seemed to be in a swoon, bereft of speech and strength."

Romano and Biancosi in silence led the blind woman back through the streets of Jerusalem to the hospice on the hill. Devotion to the Passion of Our Lord grew in her heart by leaps and bounds, the more intensely by reason of the lack of external distraction. And this devotion is one of the distinguishing marks of her spiritual life.

### III

Returning home in the middle of September the pilgrims found their way beset with dangers. A very numerous train including several personages of high rank, among whom was Pietro della Puglia, Camerlengo to His Holiness, Clement VII, they moved by caravan to Rama, at that time an obscure place marked on the horizon by a group of towers and minarets rising out of the midst of thick old olive trees. In this vicinity began the domination of the Arab robbers of the mountain, who approached the spot by many little sinuous valleys concealed behind the hills and lay there ambushed by rocks and shrubs, ready to pounce upon a caravan at the first unguarded moment. Alarming news awaited Angela's party, who thought it best to remain for some days at Rama to evade the robber-band lying in wait for them. It was not an unusual fate of pilgrims.

<sup>10</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

At length the party, reassured, pushed on to Jaffa, a matter of forty kilometers, along a road magnificent with all the fruit trees and all the flowering shrubs in the East, hedged with myrtles, jessamines, pomegranates, watered by little streams escaping from the Turkish fountains; and under a sky grand, solemn, deep-colored; and at length looking to a sea without limit, blue as the sky; with strange and picturesque people passing by, Bedouins from Jericho in immense folds of white linen, Turkish Agas proud on the desert horses and followed by Arabs and black slaves, and families of Greek pilgrims seated on the ground, eating boiled rice or barley from a wooden platter. Young Biancosi's eyes exulted at the moving panorama as his horse moved gayly forward, leading affectionately that of his blind cousin, who sat erect, patient and brave in her saddle.

Then at last safe in their good old frigate, they were off to the Isle of Cyprus, where there was merchandise to be attended to. At Crete they lay for a day or so to get provisions and here another extraordinary experience awaited them. Most of the passengers, profiting by the day of rest, went down to visit the city. The Brescian party, intending to stay behind, heard incidentally of an interesting church not far off where there was a crucifix before which a number of special graces had been obtained. Always loving to venerate the Cross Angela was eager to go, so her cousin and the merchant led their blind friend up the narrow hilly street to the church. Through these long months of sightlessness she had found ample time for reflection upon this strange reversal of what she had always been led to believe was God's Providential dispensation of her life. If her years were to be spent in retirement alone with Him, this was the most favorable trend of circumstances, but for the activity she had so long anticipated for herself, for the peculiar institute she had been shaping in her mind, it was a lamentable impediment. Kneeling before the famous crucifix in the Isle of Crete Angela felt impelled to beg of Heaven the recovery of her sight. Full of faith and resignation she faltered out her prayer, that if it were for the glory of God and the good of souls her sight might be restored: if it were not, she would voluntarily accept blindness for the remainder of her days.



Scarcely had the prayer been uttered aloud, than to the astonishment of herself and her companions she began to see, and her sight remained perfect from that moment to the end of her life. All her fellow travellers came flocking around her at the news. The cure was complete.<sup>11</sup> And down to the vessel the word was passed from mouth to mouth. What a moment! From Mount Calvary itself to come blind, and then to open one's eyes upon a rough-hewn cross in an out-of-the-way shrine, a wooden image of the Christ, blunt-edged under the clumsy hand of man!

So Angela Merici walked a new earth that evening under the early stars as she wended her way back to the ship with its flapping sails and creaking timbers, and met once again the goodly smiles of the people and the friendly hands held out to congratulate her.

#### IV

Pulling out from the harbor of Crete,<sup>12</sup> two other Venetian ships took to sea at the same time, under wing of the big pilgrim vessel. At first all went well, but the Adriatic held in store one of its proverbial tempests, which come up rapidly and furiously, and rage without consideration for man, bird or beast. The cries, the groanings, creakings, and heavings of the ship, the monstrous gulping of an angry sea; no Heaven and no earth! Three days of this extremity the pilgrims endured. The other two boats, merchant ships bound to Venice with many passengers and rich goods, they could see through the elemental fury, casting off their cargo, shattered helm to hulk, and at last engulfed with every creature aboard.<sup>13</sup>

With what sentiment the pilgrims watched the bitter tragedy

<sup>11</sup> Sworn testimony of A. Gallo, Oct. 29, 1568, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 231. "She lost her sight while going, and recovered it in Candia on her return from the Holy Land," p. 223; also from Girelli, *Vita*, § 22: "Her sight returned: whether by instantaneous miracle, or gradually is not clear. This seems certain, that it was a special favor from Heaven."

<sup>12</sup> The circumstances of this disastrous voyage were sworn to by Antonio Romano, who had gone through the harrowing experience. He brings his testimony to a close with these words: "All the passengers realized that they were saved by a miracle, which they attributed to the prayers and merits of the servant of God." Sec. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Deposition*, June 21, 1568, Bertolotti, p. 225.

enacted before their eyes it were hard to say. Lamentations, sighs, cries, filled the air. Angela alone, says Salvatori, remained calm in the midst of the general turmoil and upon her all fixed their eyes. The prodigy which they had all seen enacted in her favor inspired the people with confidence in her prayers so that they gathered around her as the palladium of the ship. She kept herself in constant prayer, scarcely snatching a few moments for food or sleep. Six days longer the storm held on, hurling here and there the helpless pilgrim ship, but they all with one accord declared that to Angela's prayers they owed their escape from the fate of their companion vessels.<sup>14</sup>

An ancient painting in the parish church at Desenzano shows the Venetian ship in the midst of an Adriatic storm, the great prow slashing its way through a frothing sea, its three tall masts and rigging struggling in the wind, and human figures dimly descried on the decks.

A new adventure soon confronted them. The pilot, resuming the normal government of the ship, suddenly discovered that the wind had swept them south on to the coasts of Barbary into the very jaws of Algerine piracy. To appreciate the horror of the moment one must visualize the situation, the age-long and bloody conflict with the corsairs of those coasts, which to the modern mind is like a faded picture in the dim and gorgeous past; but to the friends of Angela on that Venetian vessel it was a reality neither dim nor gorgeous. For fifty years the corsairs had been making depredations upon Christian coasts, carrying off into slavery the inhabitants, and swooping down incontinent upon Christian fleets, seizing the passengers as galley slaves, the Venetians and even the Knights of Rhodes making reprisals in kind, to an extent difficult to excuse. Great iron chains were swung across the ports of the Mediterranean isles to bar entrance to corsairs, and to prevent piratical descents upon the coasts long lines of towers and forts were set up.<sup>15</sup> The innumerable brigantines and feluccas, flutes, galiots and carracks of those waters were propelled as much by galley slaves as by sails, consequently the seizure of innocent men furnished forth the navi-

<sup>14</sup> *Deposition of Romano*, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>15</sup> Vertot, *op. cit.*, III, 14, 20, 130.

gation of the period, both Christian and infidel. The right to enslave constituted the unwritten naval law of the age.

Prince Dschem, when captured, among other bribes offered for his liberty, made the Knights of Rhodes the magnanimous offer to free *three hundred Christians of both sexes each year* without ransom!

Now, when Angela's ship realized its critical position off the Barbary coasts, the crew had to fight their way out of the predicament with desperation. At last the gallant craft found itself in the port of Durazzo in Albania. What was their further consternation now to find themselves in the midst of a Turkish fleet of men-of-war, refugees, like themselves, from the storm; and, though Gabriel Martinengo, who was on board and who was Vice Governor of Candia, was acquainted personally with the Turkish commander, nevertheless, before leaving the harbor some of the Turkish boats craftily slipped the line under cover of darkness to waylay the pilgrim ship. Again the crew relied upon Angela's favor with Heaven, and as out of some dark nightmare they found at length sunny security in the lagoons of Venice, where Romano being obliged to remain for several days on business, all the city was soon ringing with "Angela! Angela!" for all the pilgrims with their blood-curdling escapes to tell of were unanimous in believing it to be the result of her prayers.

Venetians high and low began to throng the door of the Franciscans where she stayed, curiosity, reverence, skepticism, varying shades of motivation impelling them; while Angela, in simplicity, could but answer, as did the blind man in the Gospel, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see!" and to the incredulous she may very well have exclaimed: "Why herein is a wonderful thing, that you know not from whence He is, and He hath opened my eyes!"

How good her native land must have looked as they floated into the gorgeous lagoons of Venice. No wonder Angela greeted her stream of visitors with such glad simplicity, after the long dark months of anguish when she had supposed that never again would she look into a kindly human face. Romano and Biancosi had gone to stay at a hotel, but on account of the talk of her fellow passen-

gers, especially the Vice-Governor of Candia,<sup>16</sup> so great a concourse crowded to the doors of the hospice that Romano insisted that she come to the centre of the town and stay at the Hospital of the Incurables and not cause trouble and distraction at the monastery. Her rare spiritual power was quickly appreciated: so that, learning of her efficiency among the poor, the Signori Deputati called upon her formally at the hospital and offered her the superintendence of their public charities, if she would only remain in the city; but this, Angela, ever true to her early inspiration, declined. Now, more than ever, since her answered prayer before the crucifix of Crete, did she feel the stimulus of her life-ambition. One can fancy the elasticity in her step, the more certain glance of her eye, as she trod anew her Italian soil, and thought of the work which lay before her.

## V

There would naturally be little of religious art in the Venice of her day that did not attract her, and few shrines which did not elicit her veneration during her stay there. Among the many great paintings in the Venetian churches and palaces there was a series painted by Carpaccio which for Angela Merici held a certain significance. It was the Legend of St. Ursula in one of the Guild Halls,<sup>17</sup> nine paintings which he had done there between 1790 and 1795.

Not that Carpaccio's painting was the origin of her idea, not that it first led her thoughts in this direction, for St. Ursula was a familiar patroness of the mediaeval guilds and churches in Italy, well known to Angela from early childhood.<sup>18</sup>

Carpaccio was popular as the painter of religious legend in Venice and was considered the most delightful story teller of his time. It would be hard to find a more lovely picture than that one in his series of St. Ursula painted for one of the Guild Halls, representing the young princess lying wrapped in maiden slumber, beholding in her dream the saintly future in store for her and the young companion of her career, the prince, half-knight, half-angel, whose

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Odorici Storie Bresciane*, Vol. IX, p. 156. "G. Martinengo, nostro cittadino," made Gov. Gen. of Candia, in 1518.

<sup>17</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> See Appendix Note on St. Ursula.



image hovers at the door of the mediaeval room; the soft dawn in the window, the antique furniture, the desk where the maiden has said her prayers, the profound, the holy sleep, so solemn, and the vision, "in which there is no unrest as of earthly love always full of disquiet, but a stillness as of great tragic possibilities foreseen."<sup>19</sup> Manifestly, St. Ursula's appeal to Angela must have been from various points of view. Learning was the new vogue of the day; the young must be placed under its banner, and through trained intelligence make choice of the pure and the heroic. Angela was wise enough to perceive the peculiar fitness of such a patron, even regarded from the merely human point of view. When or where she took up her idea of enrolling her institute under St. Ursula's name is unimportant; the fact remains that as her project matured in her mind this notion strengthened and her love for the martyr-princess grew.<sup>20</sup>

Ursula, leader of a band of maidens from Brittany who were martyred in Cologne by the Huns in the fourth century<sup>21</sup> and whose glory is historically enshrined in the church of St. Ursula in that city, became, as protectress of the young, the patron of the Sorbonne in Paris, the University of Vienna, that of Coimbra in Portugal, and other celebrated seats of learning. As Angela gazed upon the quaint and interesting conceptions with which Carpaccio has treated the subject it is not surprising that the idea of the popular martyr-saint took on a more definite shape in her thoughts. Yes, she would have in her organization a quality that was military; she would have leadership, and a "governor"; she would call it a Company.

But when the people began to press her officially to remain in Venice, taking fright lest some greater influence be brought to bear, such as that of the Patriarch or Senate, she left very suddenly, and with her two devoted fellow-travellers directed her way back to Brescia.

<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Oliphant: *Makers of Venice*, p. 284.

<sup>20</sup> Bertolotti ascribes the famous painting of St. Ursula by Moretto, in the church of San Clemente in Brescia, to the influence of Angela's Company, perhaps through Gallo, who was a friend both of Angela and of the great painter. See *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix Note: "The Legend of St. Ursula."

Home once more, then. The obstacles she had met with had but more clearly convinced her that a great work lay in store for her, and the adulation of a metropolis like Venice had not blinded her in the least to any detail of her girlhood's inspiration. She came back to Brescia full of a new fearlessness and more than eager to begin her teaching-project.

## VI

But the home town which Angela found upon return to her apartment in the Romano house, was distressing in the extreme. The struggle of foreign powers for possession of Milan<sup>22</sup> had resolved itself into a crisis: the Sforzas had played off Germany against France, and now Duke Francesco II had fled from Milan to refuge in Brescia, having lost everything but his faith, as an old historian expresses it.<sup>23</sup> Angela's industrious townspeople were trying with what heart they could muster to keep their business going, in spite of the general disintegration, while every day large quantities of wine, bread, hay, artillery, money, were being taken from them and the bread-line was still drawn up in the Piazza in Brescia. Terrors of a new invasion like that of 1512 gripped the hearts of the citizens, for German and Swiss troops were once more scattered throughout Lombardy.

The cities had to go to war against the outrageous treatment of the German soldiery, so out from Brescia Antonio Martinengo and Francesco Gambara led important divisions. Martinengo, fatally wounded, was carried back to Brescia where he died the same day. Angela had seen him ride out from the city but shortly before and now she beheld his funeral cavalcade, . . . while the superb mausoleum in which they laid the dead man was a curious witness to the character of the age, when neither the cry to arms nor the fear of a conquered Italy prevented their executing one of the richest monuments of the artistic sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ady, *History of the Sforzas*, p. 249: The state of Milan was quite small in itself: a man might cross it in twenty-four hours. The root of its trouble was its advantageous situation, which made it easy to conquer and a convenient stepping stone both in war and commerce.

<sup>23</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 178, 179.

<sup>24</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, IX, pp. 182, 183.

Not many months after her return home, the Jubilee of 1525 opened in Rome, whither crowds of people turned, eager for the spiritual advantages to be found in the Holy City. Angela went with a party of friends. In the Eternal City she visited the seven Basilicas, prayed at the tomb of St. Peter, and joyously breathed the atmosphere in which the early Church and the Christian martyrs sprang to life. Assuredly these years were to Donna Merici as though she were drinking at the very springs of faith. If in all her past she had known the ways of sorrow, now she was climbing the paths of spiritual exaltation. In Rome her party came across the Pope's Camerlengo, Pietro della Puglia, who had been a passenger on that famous ship of the preceding summer, and he, delighted to see Angela once more, obtained for her a private audience with Pope Clement VII, a favor which Angela was not slow to appreciate. In fact, it is not unreasonable to conclude that in Angela's mind, now more decidedly bent than ever towards her new idea, she should have desired, as was ever her way, to consult the highest authorities upon so important a venture. It was not her habit to be satisfied with any advice short of the best. With the fresh vigor of her intellect she held this in common with her age. There was much in her character of the quality which the Greeks used to admire, an inclination, not to extremes, but towards a nice balance, and this she understood was to be had only by seeking the counsel of experts. On this point she resembled St. Teresa of Avila, who always steered clear of ignorance in matters of moment and had rather an amusing horror of what might be termed half-informed advisers. Similarly, it can scarcely be conceived that Angela would have left Rome without a personal interview with the Pope, and one might also make bold to say that it was for this primarily that she had come to Rome.

Elected on the eighteenth of November, 1523, Clement, the second Medici Pope, was a great noble and an expert politician.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Pastor, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, p. 249. " 'This Pope,' Loaysa reported to the Emperor, 'is the most secretive man in the world, and I have never spoken with one whose sayings were as hard to decipher.' His subtle statecraft proved a fatal characteristic: he could never shake himself free from doubts and fears which often impeded his transactions at the time when crises of affairs demanded a positive stand."

Clement VII had heard from the lips of Pietro della Puglia details of the pilgrimage, and with the greatest kindness he received Donna Merici in a lengthy interview. He was a pope who gave audiences with the utmost freedom of access, marked in his courtesy to all classes, and bestowed graces with great generosity. Angela was ushered into the presence of a man of tall and gracious figure: a man of great industry, frugal, full of uprightness and piety, who spoke well on any subject brought before him. When he discovered for himself the qualities with which she was endowed he invited her to stay in Rome and to undertake the supervision of some of the local charities. But Angela, says Salvatori, excusing herself modestly, probably acknowledged the truth to him, revealing to him "as to the legitimate interpreter of the Will of God the commands she had formerly received from Heaven";<sup>26</sup> so the Holy Father, not wishing to do violence to her inspiration, gave her in parting the Apostolic benediction. We shall later see how the document issued subsequently by Rome to Angela seems to bear evidence of the idea having been not only familiar but congenial to the Holy See. Clement told his Camerlengo after Angela's audience that he had recognized in her<sup>27</sup> greater powers than Monsignor Puglia had described, and that it would indeed be a great advantage for Rome to have her settle there in the city.

## VII

Still in Brescia the poor went crying for bread outside the Podesta's palace. Angela, doomed to inaction in the matter she had at heart, found plenty to do in the hospitals. In these Brescia was fairly well supplied and in normal times she could look after the needy with an intelligent charity: for if you were a poor man or woman without other support, you might lodge at the San Faustino, finding your board elsewhere:<sup>28</sup> and if you were an ordinary working man or woman without means of paying rent for a house, you could lodge permanently at the Mercantia and go out every day to

<sup>26</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pastor, *op. cit.*, Vol. XI, pp. 525, 527.

<sup>28</sup> Relazione fatta per Paolo Correr, Podesta di Brescia, in Zanelli, *Devozione, op. cit.*, in *Arch. Stor. Lombardo*, April, 1912.



work and board. Even poor travellers passing through the city might stop for one day and a night at the city's expense in San Antonio Hospital.

The Incurables had an endowment for the poor, while the Hospital Grande could look after six hundred and fifty patients, besides giving daily two loaves and a bottle of wine to each prisoner. In all these hospitals ladies were accustomed to serve, usually wearing masks,<sup>29</sup> so that many a time did Angela take her turn watching beside sick beds.

Fitful ministrations they must have been in years of military invasion. That very Autumn brought before the city gates a numerous train under Nicolo Tiepolo to take possession in the name of Milan!<sup>30</sup> The eternal partisan turmoil must have been wearing in the extreme upon peaceful-minded citizens such as Donna Merici, the Patengolas, Antonio Romano, but Angela when not busied with charitable occupations always managed, like good old Thomas à Kempis, to find a quiet corner with a quiet book. The more life surged around her the more relief she found in the interior life. "While she stayed in my house," testified the watchful Romano, "which was about fourteen years, she used to sleep on a mat using a piece of wood under her head for a pillow. I do not recollect ever having seen her eat meat, but only fruit and vegetables, and drinking nothing but water."<sup>31</sup> Romano was looked upon as an honest man, and a good citizen, alive to the interests of his time, and his word was respected.

Troubles of another vein there were likewise, assassinations among patrician families, and these, moreover, by their own blood relations. Case upon case the chroniclers of the time record.

In the Spring of 1528 war was begun anew in Lombardy; Germans, under the Duke of Brunswick, poured along Lake Garda, over-running the lands of Desenzano, Lonato, Gavardo: "Five thousand ducats, or fire and sword!" he demanded of the people of Salò. The next June the Germans passed through Brescia "with such a tremor that it seemed the world had come tumbling down:

<sup>29</sup> Pastor, *op. cit.*, Vol. V.

<sup>30</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, pp. 182, 183.

<sup>31</sup> *Deposition of June 21, 1568*, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

and every living soul had to pay tax for the support of this expedition.”<sup>32</sup> And the worst of it was, that feeling in Brescia was once more divided, such families as the Gambaras standing always for the Emperor.<sup>33</sup>

## VIII

After a feeble defence of Milan, Duke Francesco Sforza had been obliged to flee from before the Imperial troops, and, as has been said, was forced to find refuge in Brescia, where he passed his days with the Augustinian hermits of St. Barnabas. The last of the Sforzas, Francesco II, was not an uninteresting character. He had spent his childhood in exile with his brother and is familiar through the child-portrait of De Predis, which brings out the fat little cheeks and the chubby square dimpled hand clutching his falcon. But Angela saw him in the years of his ill health, a broken man, though records show him possessed of considerable intellectual qualities and a decided personal charm. In 1533 he was dead.

Bitter days for the duke were those, both because of his own private misfortunes and because of the tribulations of his beloved Milanese. In the monastery it came to his ears that Donna Merici had a singular gift of consoling the afflicted. Possibly his instant wish to see her was intensified by a fact which is included in the Process of Angela's Canonization.

As this incident was once related with the racy quality which brings home to us the real flesh and blood Angela, we give here the translation of the testimony sworn to by Master Bertolino Boscoli, citizen of Brescia, on June 21, 1567, thirty years after her death, in the old Prato house, and in presence of her friend, Elisabetta Prato, who had given the first Oratory for the Company of St. Ursula.<sup>34</sup>

“It might be about thirty-four years ago, if I remember aright, that the said Madre Suor Angela lived in a house near St. Afra's below the fountain, where I sometimes went to see her, being a

<sup>32</sup> Memoriale presentata per Brescia alli Signoria di Venezia, Bib. Quer. *Codice Fe d'Ostiani*, p. 472: in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, April, 1912, Zanelli.

<sup>33</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, 191.

<sup>34</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

neighbor, as she was held in great esteem on account of her spiritual life. . . . I found myself one week-day in the neighboring church of St. Barnabas hearing Mass at the altar of St. Nicholas of Tolentino, where, at that Mass, many others besides saw the Madre Suor Angela, who, if I remember aright, while the priest was saying the Gospel, not only I, but many of those who were at that Mass, saw the said Madre Suor Angela standing and raised from the ground about a span's length as if suspended in a marvellous way and it appeared to me a miraculous thing."<sup>35</sup>

The incident certainly inspired awe in the beholders, and being noised throughout the city served to draw the public attention, as Boscoli proceeded to testify: "and this thing became known to many in the city, who in that way came to know her holiness and her religious life."<sup>36</sup> And upon reflection, it would seem worthy of note that her career, which had in early years been quite obscure, had reached the point now when in its Providential course it was necessary to elicit the confidence of the public for her new society, which was such an innovation in Brescia that after her death a hubbub of opposition was to arise against it.

The Duke requested that this remarkable woman visit him at the convent, which desire Angela fulfilled, always at the beck of one who asked for help. She saw before her a tired, dispirited man, of excellent intentions, with kind eyes full of life, the expression alert with sudden hope.

He found her simple and unassuming, and was soon impressed with the wisdom of her words, upon his relating the tale of his desperate experiences. She inspired him with patience and Christian

<sup>35</sup> *Deposition*, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, pp. 229, 230.

<sup>36</sup> The phenomenon of Levitation is discussed in Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, in which he shows that the proofs evinced by Psycho-Physiologists in favor of a naturalistic explanation, are entirely fallacious. St. Teresa, who experienced the phenomenon, said: "It seemed to me when I tried to make some resistance, as if a great force beneath my feet lifted me up. I know of nothing with which to compare it." *Life*, Chap. XX, 7. Pope Benedict XIV, in his work on *Canonization*, discussing the motives God has in allowing such a phenomenon, says: "By Divine power the body may be raised on high, not because this has any necessary connection with ecstasy resulting from a vehement divine contemplation, but because God, in order to instruct us therein, grants at times to the enraptured this special gift; which gift is a certain imperfect participation of the gift of fleetness, which will be bestowed upon glorified bodies." *Treatise on Heroic Virtue*, Vol. III, Chap. X, p. 242. See Poulain, pp. 550-554.

resignation. She too knew what it was to be doomed to inactivity, to pray, to suffer, and to keep up courage. And once more, for the hundredth time, her singular power to touch the heart and to inspire the will was made manifest. The Duke, deeply impressed, began from that visit a friendship with her which lasted many years, and often in after times did he consult her both personally and by letter.<sup>37</sup> With a gallant simplicity, he begged her to become his spiritual guide and to take special interest in watching over his people. Even Guicciardini, cynical in his scrutiny of virtue and vice alike, softens at the thought of a Sforza, abandoned by all men, hanging upon the words of the obscure Donna Merici of Brescia.<sup>38</sup>

Angela was the last person in the world to pose as spiritual director. She had far too much sense and far too much of the rare virtue of humility. Although she was clearly capable of an initiative that was almost bold, yet in matters of conscience she always relied upon the guidance of others. Far from considering herself qualified as spiritual director, she suffered from misgivings, and never took any step without expert advice. She had not even come to live in Brescia without consulting her Tertiaries' authorities,<sup>39</sup> and she invariably set aside the repeated supernatural revelations she had received, in favor of the decision of her own director. Upon this occasion she merely satisfied the unhappy Sforza that she would help him and his people all she could, and she kept her word.

She was not, as is clear, an angel, but a real woman of flesh and blood, and the life of adulation which her gift of spiritual discernment brought upon her was not without its difficulties. There is no blandishment of the flesh that can equal blandishments of the spirit in their power to enervate character. Our native desire to be as gods brings us all too quickly to dream that our wish has been fulfilled. It is therefore not surprising to find the early biographers relating Angela's temptations to vain glory. She had to fight the weakness of nature and the insinuations of the enemy of souls. She had been too good a soldier in the field for God, not to bring down upon herself the powers of darkness. "A malicious fraud

<sup>37</sup> For F. Sforza as protector of religion see *L'Inquisizione Romana e lo stato di Milano*, by Luigi Fumi, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, 1910.

<sup>38</sup> Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, p. 189.

<sup>39</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 23.



was planned against her," as Mme. Girelli expressed it. All her biographers witness that the devil transformed himself into an angel of light,<sup>40</sup> praising her for the high favors she had received from Heaven. But Angela at once perceived the snare.

"How could she," asks Madame Girelli, "after experience of Heavenly visions, so readily distinguish a bad angel? Precisely because she had been accustomed to genuine visions. What comes from God is attended by humility; and this spirit appealed to the passion of pride. Angela used to say that the most dangerous snare the devil can set is to induce people to wish for visions!" Nazari,<sup>41</sup> her contemporary, who knew well the vogue for the mysterious, — on the one hand, the popular sorcerers, on the other the religious hypocrites of sixteenth century Lombardy, — commended Angela for her discernment and her good sense.

"At that time," he said, "there were many deluded persons who longed to be considered spiritual. They feigned visions only to boast of them under the guise of a humble desire for God's glory. Too proud to submit to guidance, stepping out of their proper sphere, they presumed to pose as guides to others. Some even boasted that like the seraphic Saint Francis they too bore on their bodies the sacred stigmata."<sup>42</sup>

Angela knew that supernatural favors are granted by God only after many humiliations, sufferings and toils. "And so this Madre," concludes Nazari, "to avoid falling into such errors and diabolical snares, put no faith at all in any vision." She brought all her influence to bear against such hypocrisy in religion, and her experience with these human freaks only strengthened the more her conviction that the real remedy for all such fashionable disorders lay in the proper education of the young.

## IX

But how could this be accomplished? By the late summer of 1529 so distracted were the Brescian territories with sack and fire and lawless soldiery and so ominous the outlook, that all the good

<sup>40</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 16.

<sup>41</sup> *Relazione scritta nel 1560*, MSS. Quer. D. VIII, 20, Bertolotti, p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> See A. Gallo on visions, in Bertolotti, p. 234.

families began to scatter like leaves before a storm. Duke Sforza with all his court went to Cremona and as the Imperial troops centred at Brescia, the citizens hurried their families out of the town as fast as they could. The Patengolas also fled to Cremona and the Gallos followed, while Caterina Patengola and Hippolyta Gallo prevailed upon Angela at last to come there and lodge with them in a house they had all taken together on the Estrada St. Victor. Angela felt herself helpless in face of a great military invasion: there would be neither freedom nor security. So in Cremona she went on with her life of prayer, devoting herself more than ever to pleading for her miserable country, for the peace of Italy, of the Republic of Venice, and for the Holy Father, Clement VII.<sup>43</sup>

She was staying with the Gallos at Cremona, and Agostino seems to have had a wary eye as to what she was doing, for he speaks of her "supporting great heat, extreme cold, ravenous hunger, besides depriving herself of the comfort of sleep, since the little she took she had on a mat and a piece of wood, in such a way before day-break she turned it over in a roll so that no one saw any other bed. Nor did they see any sort of vessel for wine. I noticed she did not drink anything but water unless on the great feast of the Nativity, and the Resurrection, she drank at dinner a single thumb-measure of wine, eating always a little bread, but she took fruit and green things, and this also with great parsimony."<sup>44</sup>

So excessive was the severity of penance to which she gave herself up that at last her frail body succumbed and she fell into a serious fever. What aggravated her condition was the constant stream of excited people that made demands upon her day after day, to such an extent that Augustino Gallo, in whose house she was staying, later testified that from morning till night she was beset by people of all conditions,<sup>45</sup> consulting the poor woman on the affairs of their spiritual welfare: in their fears and desolation they seemed guided by a secret instinct to Angela Merici, more secure beneath her shadow than behind ramparts garrisoned with cannon. She became so ill under the strain that her friends, the

<sup>43</sup> See Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 29.

<sup>44</sup> Sworn testimony of A. Gallo, Oct. 29, 1568, in Bertolotti, p. 233.

<sup>45</sup> Gallo's *Deposition*, p. 232.

Gallo family with the Patengolas, were in grave concern for her life, but Angela wished nothing better than to breathe out her spirit for the people and in reparation to the Divine Justice. At last the Cremona physicians gave her up and Signor Patengola, quite beside himself with grief, broke to her the fact of her coming demise while the news spread through the city so that her room at the Gallos was soon thronged. "The saint is dying! The saint is dying!" word went around; and every one was eager to catch her supreme adieux.

Propped up against the pillows, Angela received the summons with joy; a radiance springing from her soul seemed to reanimate her emaciated body with a sudden vigor which astonished everybody in the room. The words she said were never set down, but she spoke of Heaven and of her joy in passing, and of the happiness of going to her God, a rapturous transport which lasted more than half an hour. There was no regret, no looking back over long years of preparation for a work which had gradually come to take on the character of the supernatural, and an achievement which she had come to long for as her peculiar riches in this world; there was no stopping to question if after all it had been but one long illusion, as one might suppose she would have thought. To minds like Angela's the will of God is the only finality, and all their projects when tested out prove to be, in the souls of those who conceive them, as realities that are more spiritual than material, more of the other world than of this: as St. Paul says, "I plant, Apollo waters, God gives the increase:" or as a poet has expressed it "on earth the broken arc, in Heaven the perfect round." Without one rueful glance backward, then, she looked death in the face.

Agostino Gallo's account of the scene bears his usual realistic touch: "She suddenly raised herself into a sitting position talking so vehemently of the joy of that celestial country, for fully half an hour, her face resplendent with light like the Cherubim, in such wise that not only all those that were in the room, which was very full, seemed as if they were in Paradise, but besides, through the great joy she felt to be leaving the world which she always desired to do, she recovered her bodily strength so that she realized that she was entirely cured of her illness; she began to weep and com-

plained greatly of Patengola, accusing him of having told her this only to tease her, and not because he believed it to be true that she was about to die. Upon his declaring that he had done it firmly believing that she was going to die before the next day dawned, and that he had not at all meant to do anything to displease her, she quieted down."<sup>46</sup>

What a picture of that mediaeval sick room! A thousand painters could not have painted it as Bonhomme Gallo did! She was cured. She called Hippolyta.

"Bring my dress and my veil," she bade.

They could scarcely believe their eyes.

"Alas!" she cried, weeping, "I am cured. The Lord has not yet found me worthy to go."

Amazement filled the room, but there was no doubt about her recovery. The dying woman was soon upon her feet and moving around the room. She would hear to nothing but getting ready for a day's journey to Varallo on horseback. She would go to Varallo to visit the shrine of the Sepulchre there.

"Let us bless the Providence of God," she said, "dying or living."

She insisted that it was her sins that had held her back. "For," said she, "Jesus Christ Himself gained that happiness only at the price of fatigue and suffering while I scarcely know yet what it is to suffer."

And so the group of friends, now more firmly knit than ever, took horse and rode with her to Varallo, southwest of Lake Maggiore, where contemplating the images of Christ's sacred passion, this woman of such energy and fire of soul gave thanks to God for the gift of life late renewed, and offered herself for the people's peace, the Church and her beloved Italy.<sup>47</sup>

And the Lord, Madame Girelli states, deigned to assure Angela by interior revelation that her prayers had been heard. From that date she cast off all sadness and anxiety concerning Italy's vicissitudes, and buoyantly encouraged everybody to hope for more calm days.

<sup>46</sup> Sworn testimony on Oct. 29, 1568, in Bertolotti, p. 234.

<sup>47</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 29.



Nor was she deceived. Shortly afterwards the Emperor was reconciled to the Venetian Republic, to the Duchy of Milan and to the Papacy, and the following year the Pope crowned Charles V at Bologna. One must admire the part which she played in the sad drama of her days. Saints are not indifferent spectators to the tears of the Church and to the calamities that overwhelm nations.

After the Peace of Cambray she returned to Brescia, the city of her childhood dreams, remaining a few months with the Gallos at San Clemente, and then, with her old companion, Barbara, she settled down in a small room near Saint Barnabas church, where she could easily hear many Masses and the sermons. Her confessor at this time was an Augustinian, a Canon Lateran of the Church of Saint Afra, Father Serafino by name, a prudent and learned man who, at this important moment, was destined to guide a momentous decision. To Father Serafino Angela confided her life-story and to him left the final word regarding her action.

She had a strong mind of her own, plenty of initiative, plenty of resolution; it was not the mind of another she was looking to; it was the direction of the Holy Spirit of which she had had enough personal reason to be very sure, but which she would not accept finally until it came to her through the organ of the Sacrament of Absolution, the channel of grace for decisions of conscience. Far from relying upon her own visions or revelations, far from priding herself upon the special light of Heaven which during these five wonder years her neighbors had come to ascribe to her, she now submitted her whole experience and mind, these things included, to the guidance of authority. But Father Serafino, to whom her conscience was new, put her through many wearisome and necessary tests before he would pronounce any decision.

Five years of strange reverses and trials! five years of a spiritual growth that had begun to attract the notice of her townsmen, and still the future seemed enigmatical; the martyr-princess, St. Ursula, might brood over her in dreams, as tradition says, reproaching her delay; for twelve long years had she matured her plan, living in the thought of it; but in such a devastated land and at such an hour, who could venture to say to her, "Begin!" However, from the darkest skies spring forth the clearest stars.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE COMPANY OF SAINT URSULA

#### I

BUT Angela's dream materialized at last.

Undoubtedly, the conclusions she had reached in meditating were reflexes from her own social experiences. She was of those who deplored the ungoverned luxury which led to the Sumptuary Laws of 1532 and 1533;<sup>1</sup> the outcome of heated discussions in the Brescian city council.<sup>2</sup> She was affected to some extent, also, by the political movement along Lake Garda; for in these years, Desenzano and a group of towns dependent upon its markets broke off from the jurisdiction of Venice and set up a Podesta of their own in Desenzano<sup>3</sup> where her old home still stood. Her patrimony there was long since spent upon, or rather invested in, the poor, but her spiritual daughters there certainly felt the change, and her relatives were involved in the disturbance; and Angela's relatives were always a factor in her life.

Perhaps, she was public-spirited enough to be interested in the eternal river dispute between Brescia and Cremona? Or how did she endure the clacking of tongues over the new doctrines, Mrs. Grundy being for the preachers who fell under the ban, and Mrs. Featherhead being horribly opposed to them?

Angela must have thanked God for the coming of Cardinal Francisco Cornaro as Bishop to the province of Brescia and the

<sup>1</sup> Ettore Verga: *Le Leggi Suntuarie Milanesi*, *op. cit.*, Verga's work on the *Sumptuary Laws* is specially valuable because while materials are copious in Tuscany they are scarce in Lombardy. The technique of his investigation is interesting and fine. He examines the meanings of the expressions used in the ancient statutes and by comparison with various dialects and reliable authorities decides upon the gist of the legislation. Following his article is an *Indice delle Materie*, four pages: a list of mediaeval materials and articles of dress and living which should prove very useful to any one studying the subject.

<sup>2</sup> Sanuto, *Diarii*: also Odorici, IX, 193.

<sup>3</sup> Ulisse Papa: *Venezia*, in *Arch. Veneto*, Aug., 1889.

city, when Bishop Paolo Zane, so long connected with the wars and the reconstruction of the place, the annoying intricacies of the sorcery movement and the Inquisition, had gone to his reward. Old Rossi describes the event: "Cardinal Cornaro, herald of peace, came into Brescia riding a Turkish horse covered with damask, in beautiful procession, such as they have at Corpus Christi. He dismounted in the centre of the Cathedral square, and there blessed his new people."<sup>4</sup>

As "herald of peace" he meant much to her, for the social life of his new province was seething with individualism and unrest, reflexes of the Renaissance on one hand, and infiltrations from the German religious revolution on the other. Its moral, religious, political, and economic orders were feeling the fire of new spirits, both good and bad. Angela, deeply anxious about the social problems of her native land, rejoiced at his coming to be custodian in a fast paganizing society, the more so, as it was from him she knew she had to obtain diocesan sanction for her Company, whose program in his diocese was to be social reform.

Her director, after mature consideration, agreed that in spite of the obstacles which appeared insuperable, she should at last try to get together the young women of the city and begin to organize. She called into consultation twelve young women of Brescia, some of whose names are already familiar in this narrative; they were

BARBARA FONTANA

SIMONA BORNÌ

CLARA GAFFURI

LAURA PESCHIERA

CATARINA DOLCI

DOMINICA DOLCI

MARIA BARTOLETTI

PELLEGRINA CASALI

CHIARA MARTINENGO

DOROSILLA ZINELLI

PAOLA PESCHIERA

MARGHERITA DELL'OLMA.<sup>5</sup>

With what interest one could linger over the scene in Angela's narrow room when these young women, a little pale perhaps from the excitement of being summoned by the great Verginella, listened with beating hearts to this plan, so novel, to some, even startling, but bearing within it a certain authority, and imparting that singu-

<sup>4</sup> Rossi, *Uomini Illustri da Brescia*, also Odorici, *op. cit.*, Vol. IX, p. 193.

<sup>5</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 42; Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 32.

lar peace which accompanies the conviction of divine vocation, the call to which the Holy Spirit had been slowly shaping in the secret of hearts their individual lives. They are all spoken of as young, the twelve who were to be the first teachers in Angela's institute, as their mother.

From now on, many were the consultations held across that threshold.

## II

Looking back from our day and generation when scarcely anything in human society remains unorganized, it is difficult to imagine the bravery of these women getting together; the daring of the thing; almost effrontery; not with the noise of the suffragette, but with an unostentation, a quiet resolution, that was perhaps at that time even more amazing.

So Angela unfolded her plan. Her object in assembling them, was to lay before them a program of work by which the Brescian women might stem the tide of the new evils sweeping in upon their city. She was convinced that they had but to intrench themselves in the immemorial teachings of Mother Church, and that if they worked together in unity, they might, as a matter of fact, become a powerful influence to uphold those teachings in face of the bitter assaults that were being hurled against them. They could all be confident from the start that at least "the gates of Hell shall never prevail."

To these young friends, Angela spoke<sup>6</sup> of the fundamental virtues in conduct, of the sublime virtue of purity, of respect for authority, of Christian poverty, prayer, of the purpose of life; to know God, to love Him, to serve Him in preparation for the life to come. She pointed out, not only the obvious need of charitable offices throughout the highways and byways of their beloved Brescia, but to these calm-browed Brescian women she spoke of ideals to be upheld,<sup>7</sup> and particularly of the flower of their womanhood which was being trailed in the dust.<sup>8</sup> She drew attention to the satirical attacks upon womanhood; how chastity was pronounced an im-

<sup>6</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 32.

<sup>7</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 33.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Die heilige A. Merici*, von M. Vincentia Neusee, pp. 110-114.



possibility, even a crime against God Himself;<sup>9</sup> how marriage bonds were no longer held sacred.<sup>10</sup>

She proposed to get up a Company to militate against these wild new ideas. Certainly, the followers of Luther had attacked the cloister;<sup>11</sup> hence, this Company of young women should show that virginal ideals could well be maintained without any cloister at all. After the example of Jesus Christ, with whom there was no exception made of persons, she did not exclude from the Company any class; so that the patrician lady would be enrolled at the same time as her maid and her servant girl, without class distinction such as existed in the monasteries, but all should be equal in their life and their work.<sup>12</sup> She had not the slightest doubt that the women of Brescia could take a stand that was not merely passive in its opposition, but supremely active, and would not only maintain these principles themselves, but teach them to others as the only true Christian principles, rearing a generation that would make a better future for the world.<sup>13</sup>

She drew the attention of these girls, Clara and Paola and the rest, to the need of Christian instruction. She could not rid her memory of the horrors their city had recently witnessed in the witchcraft affair, when very young women and even little girls, because they were ignorant, were swept down to dishonor; of the homes that were being saddened every day by strife and bitter feuds and death, and every sort of uncharitableness, and this, she believed, only for lack of peacemakers. She felt that woman's office by nature is to create an abode of quiet and rest. Girls and women did not seem to understand what they ought to do; they were unintelligent, uninstructed. It was a pity that the Brescian valleys were full of such good people who fell into all sorts of disorders through ignorance. She scarcely needed to remind the young ladies of how the false ideas were spreading promiscuously, doing untold harm, how the Inquisition officers were making at-

<sup>9</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>10</sup> Luigi Fumi, *L'Inquisizione Romana e lo Stato di Milano*, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-356. Also, C. Cantù, *Gli Eretici d'Italia*.

<sup>11</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Salvatori, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Die hl. A. M.*, p. 76, *seq.*, 113, *seq.*

tempts at a censorship on press and pulpit in vain while the city officials, beside themselves, could not stop men's tongues. If evil and pernicious principles could be spread by word of mouth, by personal contact, why not good?

And then she came down to the point.

She had thought, so she said, to enlist some young women under this very standard of virginity, to arouse in them a new enthusiasm for this virtue, the pearl of their sex; she proposed to try to make the practice of it possible for those, who, lacking either a dowry or good health, or perhaps, the necessary courage, could not, or would not, enter a monastery;<sup>14</sup> she had had, so she told them, the inspiration to form a company of unmarried women who could each one live in her own home. They would be given there the spiritual training which they might have received in a cloister, and at the same time they could, in their own families, perform the office of apostles, and promote among young girls the Christian teachings of the Church and right reverence for this greatly disputed virtue of chastity.

### III

These new ideas of Donna Merici made a profound impression not only among her audience that morning, but throughout the entire city they were taken up with avidity. None knew as did the Brescian women what their Brescian girls had to suffer, how thorny the path, how uncertain the prospect was growing day by day. Angela appealed to the honor of their sex, the supreme sensitive point of their womanhood. The novelty of the new idea at that time can, at our day, be but slightly conceived of; it would take a saint indeed to make it attended to at such an hour as hers. But these twelve young girls did listen, and listened intelligently. They accepted her standards and soon all Brescia was listening. The final effects of her words on that day, in the last analysis, stand recorded in Nazari's testimony some little time after Angela's death; he declared that the example of her young disciples among their own sex in the city actually did establish custom and a manner of living, and that it always tended to good, and to obedience to the Holy

<sup>14</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

See.<sup>15</sup> In the same tenor runs a statement that appeared in a book published some few years after Angela's death: "Whoever does not understand well the ways of Holy Church and its meaning and spirit, let him look into the ways and the spirit of Madre Suor Angela and her followers."<sup>16</sup>

Two years passed by. Angela went on instructing and forming the young girls of the Company, consulting with matrons of many Brescian families,<sup>17</sup> now in long conversations on the straight bench of her room at St. Afra's, now in hospital corridors, again in their own homes; or on Festa days, here and there, when the crowds were making merry, one might see a little group of two or three substantial-looking ladies talking seriously with the worn Donzella of St. Afra's, at this epoch one of the familiar personages of Brescia.

Sometimes it was Elisabetta Prato or the ladies of the Luzzago family, several of whom were friends of hers. Hippolyta Gallo, after her husband's death, might have set her name on the lists, though Angela's old friend, Caterina Patengola, not being widowed, could have taken only a sympathetic part in the activities. Then, the Lady Maria Avogadro, a woman of ability and judgment; her opinions Angela would have valued. Maria Avogadro must have lent some prestige to the board of officers as her husband had been distinguished as Lord High Constable in the Venetian service, and her near relative, Mathio,<sup>18</sup> was, in 1533, just elected arbiter of "the differences between His Serene Highness King of the Romans, (Charles the Fifth), and our Signoria."

Such ladies as these, highborn, conservative, conscientious, were as wide awake as Angela herself to the conditions in the society of the day. Good Catholics, all, they attended Mass in the Duomo of a Sunday, they heard the warnings from the pulpit, they saw the defection of such men as Martinengo,<sup>19</sup> and deprecated the

<sup>15</sup> "Al bene ed all' obbedienza della Sede Apostolica." Nazari, quoted by Salvatori, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted by Salvatori, p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> "Andava poi conferendo col suo confessore, con diversi religiosi e sacerdoti Dotti; ed anche con diverse matrone delle piu savie e virtuose sue confidenti." Salvatori, *op. cit.*, pp. 53, 54.

<sup>18</sup> Sanuto, *op. cit.*, April, 19, 1533; April 22, 1545; Oct. 25, 1526.

<sup>19</sup> Luigi Fumi, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

new attitude towards marriage; they felt the confusion arising from the contraband books, the ribald talk of the Swiss soldiery, and of the monks infected with the false teaching.<sup>20</sup> Many an hour had they deplored the state of things with Angela, always coming back to the same starting point, the sigh, the shrug, the spread of fingers, "And what can one do?"

The saying was going around that man had no free will; that he could not control his impulses, that he need not control them;<sup>21</sup> the ladies would recall the speech of such and such wandering apostates in the Brescian neighborhood who had dared to proclaim that chastity is contrary to the preaching of St. Paul.<sup>22</sup> It was become quite clear that men wanted to do away with any authority which might interfere with their impulses; for instance, one was telling people that the Pope could not be head of the Church and Vicar of Christ because Christ is Head alone and we are His members;<sup>23</sup> a pernicious twisting of two distinct texts of scripture;<sup>24</sup> and, moreover, that the followers of the Pope were diabolical spirits under aspect of holiness.<sup>25</sup>

They all, — Donna Luzzago, Donna Avogadro, all of them, — had heard it affirmed repeatedly that the Church was opposed to Christ, to the Apostles, the martyrs; that Baptism ought not to be given to babes since these cannot confess Christ to be the Son of God; that without Baptism faith is sufficient for salvation, because when Christ said "Be baptized of water and the Holy Ghost," He meant to say "of Faith and the Word of God," another pernicious interpretation; apostates were claiming that auricular confession had been imposed not by Christ but by the Pope; they insisted that the apostles never celebrated Mass; forgetting that the ceremonies surrounding the elements of the Mass had gradually grown up in the course of time; finally, they went so far as to claim that whoever adores the Sacred Host commits idolatry.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem.*, pp. 342, 344, 345. Cf. Cesare Cantù, *Gli Eretici d'Italia*. In Vol. III, 32, 52. (Discors XLI) he devotes 20 pages to the heretics in Lombardy, many priests, 1518, in Valcamonica, who would not baptize and who said Mass "Come Dio vuole."

<sup>21</sup> Luigi Fumi, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

<sup>22</sup> *Idem.*, p. 356.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem.*, p. 355.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem.*, pp. 355, 356.

<sup>25</sup> *Idem.*, p. 356.



That the matrons of Brescia were discussing the effects of all this appalling jumble of new ideas, which found its way to the ears of the people, despite the many efforts made by State and Church to suppress it, and that Angela spent many an hour with her friends among these women, trying to discover a remedy which would save their young people from the moral results of such teaching, is evident. The day she inaugurated her Company was not the first time they had met; it was not without some kind of common agreement as to what the future program was going to provide that this representative social group, selected from the several classes of society, entered, that morning, the room near St. Afra's, to write their names determinedly on Angela's register.<sup>26</sup> They knew the Church's teaching. Her discipline might shift, it might be infringed, outraged, but her doctrines never changed.

In reply to these erratic notions, it would only be necessary to remind the young Brescian Catholic girls of Christ's words to Peter:

"Upon this rock I will build my Church";<sup>27</sup> of His viva voce teachings on the excellence of chastity; the example He gave, the Virgin Mother He had, the virgin friend of His bosom; of the authority and order which he declared, "Who hears you, hears me, who despises you, despises me"; of the necessity for such an authority to interpret the meaning of Holy Scripture, in order to safeguard the truth against every whimsical interpretation of the human mind; of an enlightened and learned authority, since the twelve ignorant fishermen themselves were no longer ignorant after their three years intensive personal training by Christ and the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit. Such were the views of the Countess Lodrone, Donna Ursula Gavardo, Elizabetta Prato, and Angela's other friends. Regarding auricular confession, not one of them but would have answered you, How, in holding the Keys, shall he bind or loose what he does not know? How shall he forgive sin if he does not know?

As to the question of free will, had it not been bandied from brain

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Die hl. Angela Merici von M. Vincentia Neusee*, Freiburg-im-Breisgau, pp. 74, 76, 116.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. XVI, 18.

to brain since the days of the Greek philosophers, freedom vs. determinism? And these very feminine ladies would have answered you, "Could it not be settled by the simplest girl among them? She is impelled to do thus and so by her natal influences, her circumstances, her relatives, her temperament, her tastes, and yet she does it not. 'I choose!' she says; 'I am free.'" This was the habitual trend of mind among Angela's coterie of friends.

#### IV

She wished her daughters clearly to see that man's will unquestionably is stronger than his impulses; she wished it clearly understood that not only are the virtues of self-control and chastity possible, but that the safeguard of marriage depends entirely upon this conviction. Angela's friends among the aristocrats of Brescia had no doubt that the people who were so excited over the new Humanism were running into the ground this notion of developing the individual;<sup>28</sup> they were forgetting that man is master of his impulses; many were anxious to forget it. The Catholic Church had taught this principle from the beginning, as they were all well aware, and would teach it to the end. Because many in the high places of the Church had failed to live up to it, was no argument against the Church itself. A ship is a ship, even if its timbers rot and drop off. Angela clearly saw that to deprive one of his free will is to deliver him over to the tyranny of brute impulse. These women were of the opinion that people were thinking so much about the Humanist ideal of individual development that they were reacting to the other extreme.

Angela Merici was at this time fifty-eight years of age. At this

<sup>28</sup> Baudrillart: *The Catholic Church and the Renaissance*, p. 16. "To praise the humanity within one's self to the highest degree of intensity, to know all, to experience all, to taste all—such is the moral law of Humanism. The highest ideal is the universal man, who develops harmoniously each fine quality latent in his body, and each faculty of his mind." Cf. Burckhardt, *The Renaissance in Italy*, Vol. II, *Religion and Morality*: "... With education the individuality of women... was developed in the same way as that of men," p. 163. "... The educated woman, like the man, strove for characteristic and complete individuality," p. 164. "... The highest praise that could be given to the great Italian women was that they had the mind and courage of men. Note the manly bearing of the women in Ariosto and Bojardo for an ideal of the time."

epoch of her life, her own reputation was such that she had but to say the word for the impress of wisdom to be recognized in any of her undertakings. Her long delay was at an end at last. A well-known figure now in Brescia, respected by men, she had become a leader of women; herself a woman, benignant of countenance, gentle of manner, forceful in execution. The years of waiting, of self-distrust, of doubtfulness, the tedious years, were gone like a dream, and the rosy dawn broke upon her achievement. It looked as though the long delay had been the weathering of her grand project, the seasoning as of timber, out of which her mature idea, balanced, sensible and transfused with spiritual light, now came forth almost perfect in its appropriateness. And indeed, without exaggeration, it is still more appropriate in modern times. God's ways are not man's ways. Like a mother who plays with her babe, He suddenly turns obstacles into glorious opportunities, and as the stone is rolled away from the sepulchre, we see in His laughing sunshine that it was after all a stepping stone and not a stumbling block. Who has not experienced such Divine coquetries of the love of God?

The slow years had elicited for Angela Merici the utmost confidence of her fellow citizens, so that when she was ready to say to the people of Brescia, "Confide to me your daughters," these came to her in great numbers.

In the same way could she command the personal support of any of the matrons in Brescia. They would have advised her concerning the proper chaperonage of the young women-workers in her Company; concerning the vexed question of the girl's dowry money; and their ideas would have been enlightening perhaps with regard to questions arising from the jurisdiction of her various officers. It was the Lady Genevieve Luzzago, who after the Foundress' death took such a firm stand in the matter of upholding Angela's exact legislation in the dispute over innovations.<sup>29</sup> Donna Luzzago was a conservative. That these ladies were long familiar with Angela's ideas, and understood that her company of St. Ursula was to militate in that very field, and that they knew this for some time previous to the First Chapter of the Company, is clear enough,

<sup>29</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

from passages in her writings. It was no new thought she set before them that day.

"Be mindful and most vigilant," she wrote, ". . . especially lest they become tainted by some poisoned heretical opinion, during these pestilential times. As soon as you perceive even the shadow of such an evil, remedy it at once. Do not permit such a seed to grow in the Company for it will produce an infection in the City and elsewhere by the bad example."<sup>30</sup>

". . . Vogliate esser soliecite, . . . specialmente che non lese macchiassino di qualche velenatta et heretica opinione in questi tempi pestiferi. . . . ondi se vi accorgereti di qualche per ombra di cosi fatta pesta, subito rimediatigli. . . . non lassati crescere simil nella Compagnia, perche il sarebbe anche un morbo di carrivo esempio alla Ciattade, et oltra ancora."<sup>31</sup>

"Let all those opinions that come and go have their way, . . . and you, pray, and have prayers said, that He may not abandon His Church."

It is to be noted that the point upon which Angela was most insistent during those few years of life remaining to her was this very thing, purity of faith, and loyalty to the Apostolic See; and these she charged her matrons to emphasize. Salvatori<sup>32</sup> describes the quality of her faith thus:

"The Faith of Angela was not only a living light to enrich the mind in mysteries that are obscure, but it was, moreover, a burning coal to inflame the heart with sacred zeal for the conservation of Catholic Doctrine, and the destruction of heretical thought. . . . The Brescian magistracy on their part had taken the most scrupulous precautions. . . . Angela too then did what she could . . . when she gathered in the city the young girls, especially the more ignorant, and to these with indescribable patience, taught the Christian Doctrine."

Girelli calls attention in this context to the fact that Angela, with special deliberation, obtained from Rome, a Brief for her burial in St. Afra's Church:

<sup>30</sup> *Testament*, 10th Bequest in Salvatori, pp. 204, 205.

<sup>31</sup> Counsel VII, *Spirit of St. Angela*, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Salvatori, pp. 72-75; see also Girelli, § 143 in *Esposizione Pratica della Regola di S. Angela Merici*, 1903, Brescia.



“To maintain herself always in the spirit of living faith, she chose a home near the glorious tombs of the Brescian martyrs, and obtained a special Brief to give her the privilege of being buried there in St. Afra’s Church, in *order to afford her daughters a silent warning* each time they should visit her tomb that they must stand firm in their faith. Yes, the children of St. Angela had to tread the ground watered by the blood of Christ’s confessors in order to visit their Holy Mother.”

## V

The foundress desired to mould the spirit of her first daughters upon Christ crucified, that in Him they might gather light and strength to practise the hardest virtues. She, herself, could never lose the impress made on her soul by her pilgrimage to Palestine, which, like a divine memory shrined in light, the more vivid perhaps, because she had experienced it in blindness, time had but served to intensify. Inevitably all natural impressions fade, but the Divine expresses itself in spiritual growth as time goes on.

“Oh,” thought she, “if only these daughters of mine, these fresh ardent young wills, could be tempered also at the holy places!”

The next best thing came to her in the light of an inspiration. She would take her young women to Varallo. Since her former visit there two years previous the facsimile of scenes in the Life and Passion of Christ had been erected on the hillside already so worn by pious feet. Thither she would betake her with her young companions, knowing intuitively how it would captivate their hearts and set the initial touch to her personal instructions. Here she showed herself the natural born teacher.

So, one fine day in August in the year 1532,<sup>33</sup> the bright-faced party set out, with many a quip and many a jest, a-horseback of course, the twelve of them, with Angela, her spare form erect, dignified, on her good horse, her white veil shrouding the luminous brow, her experienced eye minding the road, while she talked with her accustomed bonhomie to Hippolyta and Agostino Gallo, the

<sup>33</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 43. Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 33.

indomitable old friends, who shared with her the chaperonage of the eager party. This Nuova Gerusalemme nel Sacro Monte di Varallo, founded at that time, some thirty or forty years, was deservedly becoming a popular resort, for today, ascending under beautiful chestnut trees the road opens up glimpses of the lower Alps, until you come at length to the series of oratories on the slopes and the hill-top, where in life-sized figures of terra cotta, they show you the scenes of the Passion which supplement the earlier images which Angela and Clara, Margherita and the rest beheld that morning.

She was right. Here, deeply impressed, these lively Brescian girls pledged themselves to a life of abnegation, to a devoted imitation of Jesus Christ meek and humble of heart, that they might become intent upon winning souls for Him. After this pictorial representation the party of fifteen rode down the valley and took the highway to Milan where they had the privilege of enjoying the city's many spiritual advantages.

Angela had never lost her place in the admiration and esteem of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan; so as news was spread through the city of her arrival with a party of friends, the young nobleman hastened to pay her a visit. Angela received him with all the charm and naturalness so characteristic of her, and once more with spiritual discernment she laid her finger on the weak places of his character, encouraging, persuading him and fascinating him anew with the irresistible attractiveness of goodness.

As her party rested in Milan for several days before resuming their ride of some fifty miles back to Brescia, she had time to return the Duke's visit with sincere cordiality. He received her with manifest affection in all the pomp and circumstance usually extended to conspicuous personages at his court,<sup>34</sup> having it in mind not only to show his high regard, but to drive home to all his household the noble lesson that there is none higher than the true follower of Christ. Young pages lined the great stairway of the Ducal Palace as Angela passed up smiling; the painted ladies in velvet who waited upon her highness, the Duchess, stopped their whispering and bowed obsequiously as this dignified, slim woman moved toward

<sup>34</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 33.

the dais, a scene which the artists of future generations were not slow to seize upon in depicting the life of Brescia's favorite.

During this audience, Duke Francesco Sforza wished to repay in princely munificence all the indebtedness that he thought he had contracted towards his Brescian friend. He offered her a house to live in and a field of labor in Milan, which under his personal patronage and maintenance should have every prospect of thriving.<sup>35</sup> He was urgent, eager, in pressing his gifts upon her. He was anxious to have this gentle friend near him, anxious to have her share with him in watching over the poor of his beautiful city, now unfortunately so torn and harassed by the long siege of war. But Angela quietly declined these princely proposals, for she believed that God had called her to Brescia and not elsewhere. Astute teacher as she was, however, she, on her part, did not neglect the opportunity of teaching her young travelling companions through this court reception, how in the world she must bear herself as all things to all men to win souls to Christ.

The insistency with which a spiritual impression retains its hold surmounting every obstacle of the senses, of reason, is clearly manifested in Angela's unshaken idea that Brescia was to be the seat of her institute. Duke Sforza, who was a zealous upholder of religion in his dominions, laid at her disposal house and maintenance; but she who had declined the proposals of the Venetian Senate and of the Pope in Rome, returned the Duke now the same answer: "But He wills me to work in Brescia!"

## VI

Angela returned home to her little room near Saint Barnabas, though shortly after, she changed her abode and took a small house near the Church of St. Afra, in which she lived from about 1530 until her death with one of her twelve protégées, a poor girl, Barbara Fontana by name.

St. Afra's, one of those Italian Churches with façade flat to the street and a double flight of entrance steps, is a Church which is apt to come upon you with a surprise. It stands upon the site of

<sup>35</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

an ancient burying ground where was once constructed an edifice to be used as a sacred reliquary of the Brescian martyrs. Once upon a time, the place had been called San Faustino ad Sanguinem and the ancient bishops of Brescia, martyrs themselves and saints in their turn, had loved to gather up relics of the martyrs and to treasure them there, amongst these SS. Faustino and Jovita, the proto-martyrs of Brescia. In Angela's time, St. Afra's was a Church of much beauty served by the Lateran Canons who enjoyed in the city a great reputation for exemplary observance.<sup>36</sup> One of these was Angela's director, Fr. Serafino of Bologna. All its history made it a spot attractive to Donna Merici, and as Salvatori gracefully phrases it, "the thought was certainly an impulse from Heaven which willed to make this soil bedewed and fertilized by blood of so many martyrs germinate into such a beautiful garden of virgins."

In this little house ("casetta") she spent the remainder of her days with Barbara under the shadow of the Martyrs' Church, the quiet of her nights broken by the gurgling waters in the old city fountain across the way, whence she and the faithful Barbara carried their pitcher of an early morning, with the other Brescian women, water-jar on head, who gathered at the fountain for their early morn bit of gossip. They used to make their spiritual exercises in the old Church, and prayed hours before the Blessed Sacrament, "di cui quasi ogni giorno cibavasi." It is through Barbara Fontana that the traditions of Angela's later years have come down to posterity; privileged she was thus to share that crust and cup. Small physical comfort had the two, to be sure, who had no fire all year round, and who lived on alms, contenting themselves with a vegetarian diet.<sup>37</sup>

Of this period of her life Nazari declares<sup>38</sup> that Angela's whole constitution seemed to have altered its original nature, as no doctor's remedies seemed to affect her when she was ill, and her body seemed to recuperate merely by recourse to ordinary food, such as dried fruits and a few vegetables. Old Gallo, telling the tale in after

<sup>36</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 45. Girelli, § 40.

<sup>38</sup> Nazari, *Relazione scritta nal*, 1560, in Bertolotti, p. 220.



years, put it in his own naïve way: "it was discovered that nearly always the medicine was changed into nutriment, and not purgation as with the rest of us. One might say that she only let the doctors treat her in order not to scandalize people that had charge of her, rather than because of any benefit from medicine; because more often she was cured by eating some onions, leeks or other things like that, which were natural; and besides, at times when she was sick for days, she cured herself by washing her head!"<sup>39</sup> Agostino Gallo seems to have been the Boswell in Angela's life story! A woven mat served each of the women for a couch. But what need had this one, whose nights were now largely spent in ecstasy, for the bed of an ordinary mortal? Yet, singular fact, the Verginella retained vigor for long labors and travels on horseback. Her life, through the Blessed Sacrament, had practically become a miracle. Barbara Fontana testified under oath that during these years she had often seen Angela in ecstasy and even lifted off the floor.<sup>40</sup> An old painting at Brescia commemorates this fact.<sup>41</sup>

## VII

When she moved to her abode at St. Afra's and began daily instructions of her eager band, she soon saw that a central point must be secured for their meetings, a place commodious enough to suit others who would subsequently join them, as her house was entirely too small and stood in an inconvenient corner of the city. She needed a room where she could teach her daughters and where they could pursue their devotions together. Her friend, the gentle lady Elisabetta Prato, a widow of unexceptionable character, came forward at this moment knowing Angela's desire, and offered to arrange a place by throwing in one several rooms of one of her houses in the centre of Brescia, near the Cathedral Square, where Angela was able to set up a suitable oratory. They furnished a room and here began, at the close of that year, something like regular meetings.

<sup>39</sup> Sworn testimony of A. Gallo, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>40</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> S. A. Merici par une religieuse du même Ordre. Paris, 1922, p. 129.

It was near the same time that St. Ignatius Loyola and his followers were taking their first vows in Paris, 1534.<sup>42</sup>

The Oratory of Elizabetta Prato became the centre of all the meetings and conferences which took place thereafter until Angela's death, seven years at least. Imagination lingers at the spot, where, under shadow of the Cathedral tower, their purpose ripened to fruitage in that room, with the gentle Saint Paola and Saint Elizabeth and the Divine Mother looking down from the wall upon a fresh species of motherhood.

This, then, is the cradle of the Ursuline Order. And these young damsels that came trooping over the cobblestones to the regular meetings at the Oratory formed an agreeable sight of a morning when one drew aside the Venetian blinds to let in the morning sun. It was only once a month that they went to Mass at the Oratory for their Rule prescribed General Communion on the First Friday only; otherwise they went to Mass of a morning with fathers and mothers to the parish church respectively,<sup>43</sup> the little postulants from twelve to fifteen years old, accompanied by their elders or perhaps by some trusted family servant; the novices dressed in the demure garb of the regulation, and finally the professed young girls of eighteen and up, or perhaps mature women, wearing the simple short white veil, non-transparent, like that seen in the pictures of St. Angela entombed. For the Foundress did not demand any set dress for her girls,<sup>44</sup> simply an extreme modesty as to style and quality. She instructed the Lady Governors and Mistresses to watch prudently lest the sly fox, vanity, creep in to steal from their fold. Still her young girls were to be girls distinctively of the home; they were to obey the elders of their own household, and on festive occasions there was nothing in the spirit of the Rule to bar them from modifying, with liberty of spirit, their external decorum and dress. No monastic Order were they, bound by unswerving constitutions.

<sup>42</sup> F. Villambrosas says: "These two noble souls though unknown to each other passed identical judgment upon the needs of the Church and society at that deplorable epoch. The two adopted the same means, attacking the evil at its head, Ignatius for the moral and intellectual education of boys, Angela for the Christian and domestic training of girls. Both chose for their device 'to the greater glory of God.' Both fulfilled the task with wisdom equal to their virtues."

<sup>43</sup> Regola, Chap. VII, *Della Confessione*, in Salvatori, p. 170.

<sup>44</sup> Regola, Chap. II, in Salvatori, p. 165.



STATUE OF ST. URSULA

*Designed by John Rettig, at the School of the Brown County Ursulines,  
St. Martin, Ohio.*





## VIII

But as yet no step towards formal foundation had been taken. It was not that she was not yet convinced, but a hesitancy to come to a decision may easily be attributed to her practical sense of the unfitness of the time. However, it seems to be characteristic of most of the religious founders that their ideas took shape in soil which to a wordly judgment would seem least favorable to germination. It was during this interval of time that the early biographers placed two mystical experiences which Angela described to her Director, Fr. Serafino of St. Afra's. Ancient books belonging to the Company record these and old paintings show how familiar the incident was in the traditions of the Order.<sup>45</sup> She was accustomed to manifest to her director very sincerely all the lights and interior impulses of her spirit. To him she confessed that one night while she was praying, she saw an angel with a scourge in his hand and an aspect of indignation, who struck her with the scourge, declaring that Heaven had sent him to punish her for her delay. She was overwhelmed with sorrow and while imploring pardon for her weakness, she saw, not the angel, but the person of Jesus Christ, sternly reprehending her for her lack of Faith and her procrastination. She begged forgiveness and promised to fulfill the manifest will of God in her regard. In the opinion of several writers, it was shortly afterwards that the last and glorious revelation occurred in which St. Ursula with her companions appeared to her, encouraging her to set her hand to the new work, promising to be its protectress, and inspiring her with ways and means for its success.<sup>46</sup> Allusion to this experience, it seems, is made in those pictures that show Angela kneeling before St. Ursula surrounded by her maidens and

<sup>45</sup> "Lombardi attests that Angela revealed these two visions concerning the foundation of the Company to no one but her director: this accounts for the absence of any published details of the visions." Girelli, *Vita*, § 32, cf., *S. Angèle Merici, par une Religieuse*, Paris, 1922: It calls this the "Vision decisive" though it confesses difficulty in accounting for the vision: since the author finds in the Saint's circumstances sufficient justification for delay. She deduces as conclusion that a grace of a high order, emphasized by these visions, produced in Angela the effect of immediate action, p. 117.

<sup>46</sup> Neusee, *Die Heilige A. Merici*, p. 85: "Biographers tell of the vision, but contemporaries relate nothing of it; Cozzano says merely that the name was inspired by God, implying that it was inspiration through prayer."

presenting a white standard with a red cross in the centre. Angela, however, always careful not to base her action upon visions, but upon advice,<sup>47</sup> never, in choosing St. Ursula as the tutelary saint of her Company, referred to this vision as the basis of her choice.

Tradition points to the Church of St. Afra as the spot where the final step was taken in adopting the Rule.<sup>48</sup> On the Feast of St. Catharine, November 25, the anniversary of Angela's return from the Holy Land, which she always considered a notable event in her life, all the ladies of the band went to Mass in St. Afra's, receiving Communion, and formally consecrating themselves to God in obedience, virginity and mortification, according to Angela's Rule. The Foundress had not without special reason chosen St. Catharine's Day, that saint who had enjoyed the rare and priceless grace of visible espousals to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Later that same morning, all the ladies met at Angela's room adjoining the Church, to register their names in a book prepared for the purpose, with which unpretentious formality the Company of St. Ursula became an accomplished fact. Fifteen more new aspirants that morning raised the number of members to twenty-eight. In the Common Book of the Congregation this event is kept in mind by an entry: "The twenty-fifth of November is the day fixed for the Ceremony of Reception, in memory of the above fact, and of the anniversary of the happy return to Brescia of the Blessed Angela from her pilgrimage to Palestine in 1524."<sup>49</sup>

The Company was placed under the title and patronage of St. Ursula, concerning which fact, Cozzano, Angela's secretary, made a notable remark: "It was not by mere chance," he wrote, "that Angela gave it the name of Ursula. The title came from heaven." He knew the matter intimately; and fitting it was that so illustrious a virgin and leader of virgins should have been Angela's choice; more fitting that a martyr be chosen as banner bearer to a Society whose life was to be the daily martyrdom of the class-room: most fitting, that an institute devoted to the teaching of Christian Doctrine should have as its inspiration a patron crowned with the title

<sup>47</sup> Salvatori, p. 71.

<sup>48</sup> Girelli, §§ 34, 37.

<sup>49</sup> Girelli, § 37.

of Doctor,<sup>50</sup> as was St. Ursula, tutelary saint of the famous mediaeval seats of learning.

"If the full honor of martyrdom does not come to these sisters (the Ursulines)," says a biographer,<sup>51</sup> "as it came to St. Ursula, none the less, theirs is the merit of bearing the cross by their labors and of enduring with patience, persecutions and tribulations of the world, for the love of Christ and of souls."

A seventeenth-century analyst commented as follows upon the analogy between the two bands of women: "This new Order perpetuates the teaching which the Breton Princess gave her companions, and revives it in prodigious posterity. Thus does God multiply the hundred fold which He promised them for giving up everything for His sake; for," the analyst naïvely concludes, "it is probable that any one who would count all the young women enrolled up to this time under the name of Ursulines, together with all the pupils they have taught and are at present teaching under the protection of St. Ursula, would reach a number approaching eleven hundred thousand, which is the hundred fold of 11,000 virgins."<sup>52</sup>

Angela continued to teach her daughters at the Oratory in oral instructions, the duties of their new way of life. Her mildness never appeared as it did here. Lombardi says that as superior, she did not believe in imperious commands.<sup>53</sup> In the writings which she left to her Company her expressions bear evidence of a person who looks upon others as her superiors, and who urges, counsels, begs and requests that they do this or that.

## IX

But as the plan gradually shaped itself into a practical working scheme she saw that it was necessary to formulate it in permanent fashion. She realized that her end was drawing near: she was past sixty; and the vision of the ladder had implied that after she had finished this work, the Master would claim her as His own.

<sup>50</sup> *Chroniques de l'Ordre de Ste. Ursule*, Paris, 1673.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted by Girelli, § 37.

<sup>52</sup> S. A. Merici, *par une religieuse du même Ordre*, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted by Girelli, *op. cit.*

"As a torch that is about to be spent," says Girelli, "throws out brighter flashes, so Angela, with a presentiment of death, scattered among her children the most brilliant rays of wisdom and love."<sup>54</sup>

Early in the year 1536 she engaged for secretary permanently, Gabriel Cozzano, a priest of the Episcopal Council,<sup>55</sup> a learned, experienced and devout man, whom she asked to put into writing the documents which she desired to leave to her spiritual daughters. Once more, like St. Teresa, she conferred with several men of experience in the city. The Spanish saint learned through her own sad experience what the Italian saint seems to have caught from the quicker, keener temper of her own nationality, particularly heightened at the moment by the pressure of the Renaissance spirit. It was in the Italian air. One cannot sufficiently praise the wisdom with which Angela chose not indeed her own ladies, however mature, educated and experienced they might be, women with whom she had for some time been sharing her own counsels; no, relying entirely upon prayer, and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost within her own mind and heart, she took for this supremely important business, a formal secretary, with whom she spent many hours in dictating and setting in order the ideas of her lifetime. During the years ensuing upon her death, Gabriel Cozzano accounted thus for the original book of the Rule: "Out of humility she wanted me to omit her name from the introduction of the Rule."<sup>56</sup> One time she said that I, with her, had composed the Rule. But I know that it contains nothing that is mine except that I wrote out the document as carefully as I could." . . . "At times she would exclaim, 'Oh that it might please God to have the whole world come under the shadow of this Rule!'"

The Rule being duly drawn up, the next step was to secure the Episcopal Approbation so as to have authority and stability for its enforcement. At Angela's request, His Eminence, Cardinal Francesco Cornaro, the Bishop of Brescia, ordered the document to be

<sup>54</sup> Girelli, § 41.

<sup>55</sup> S. A. Merici, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>56</sup> "Non vi ho niente del mio, eccetto un pochetto di scriver fedelmente, quanto potei, li suoi sentimenti. . . . Ella sola divinamente ispirata stata la Fondatrice di tanta opera, ma in una epistola proemiale alle Regole, volle per umilita, che io tacessi il suo nome," from Cozzano's *Dichiarazione della Bolla di Paolo III*, quoted by Salvatori, p. 53.



examined by Muzio, his Vicar General, who in course of time, expressed his opinion that the work was supernatural in character, and deprecated the change of a single syllable in the manuscript.<sup>57</sup> So the Cardinal gave his decision, August 8, 1536, granting daily forty days Indulgence in his diocese to all who practised the Rule, which Indulgence Pope Pius IX, three hundred years later, confirmed in perpetuity.<sup>58</sup>

## X

The following Spring, that of 1537, on March 18th, Angela summoned the whole Company for the first Chapter and the first formal election according to the approved Rule.<sup>59</sup> On this occasion with her usual foresight she employed a Notary Public so that the elections might be thoroughly authenticated. From the document there drawn up of the minutes of the meeting we learn, through Doneda's minute scrutiny, that there were fifty-nine voters including the Foundress, and that there were thirteen members absent, making the total membership seventy-two. The Acts of this election are still in existence.<sup>60</sup> They do not mention the four illustrious widows, the saint's special supporters, who were to play later so important and practical a part in the work, which silence bears out the assertion of historians that the original membership was really seventy-six.

Tradition has it, that upon the eve of the first Chapter, praying till after midnight, Angela had a new apparition of St. Ursula, to promise that she would take special care of the new Company, and assure to Angela that God was pleased with it, and that He would perpetuate it from age to age to the end of the world.

The proceedings of the Chapter are interesting. One thinks of the Prato Oratory, of the stillness in the room while the dignified ladies sit gravely listening, Cozzano scratching away with his quill, the younger members leaning forward to lose no syllable, a few ecclesiastics, perhaps, watching absorbed, the Campanile in the neighborhood chiming out the hour, as Angela, pale and erect, emaciated, her eyes full of the light, which more and more was

<sup>57</sup> Girelli, § 38.

<sup>58</sup> Salvatori, p. 54, Sept. 7, 1866.

<sup>59</sup> *Postel* I, 121.

<sup>60</sup> S. A. Merici, Paris, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

of another world, dominated the gathering which had come there impelled by her inspiration. A fervent prayer was made by the assembly for light and guidance, after which they were all seated once more and by unanimous vote, Sister Angela Merici was chosen "Mistress, Superior and Mother, in perpetuity, for the rest of her natural life."<sup>61</sup>

At this announcement she took fright. It was like Saint Francis of Assisi at the Chapter of Mats. Indeed there is something akin in these two founders in the inclination each had to retire behind someone else who might, they hoped, administer the inspired work. Angela argued that she should be excused. She pleaded her advanced age, her declining powers, her ignorance, her inefficiency, her sins.<sup>62</sup> Such is the wont of the saints. Indeed, such is the wont of the wise. Even in modern times, presidents of states have acknowledged to their friends intimately the enforced degradation they suffer in high places, and the impotence which hampers the most sincere. Younger and more active members, she claimed, could do so much more than she. She implored them to permit her to devote her remaining years to the care of her own soul. She urged that as she had not much longer to live, the more did she need penance and prayer. She promised she would pray for them all, night and day, and that she would submit to whomsoever they might choose in her stead. But her pleading fell upon deaf ears, for all the Assembly insisted that she should be their Mother. Whether or not his Eminence the Cardinal was presiding at the session, they had to call upon him as umpire. Did the Company sit in a hushed silence while eager deputies hurried across the Cathedral square? At all events, he too, relying upon the legality and unanimity of the election, approved the vote, and nominated her as Superior and Mother, even putting her under obedience to accept a burden which seemed too heavy, but which love, he said, would make light.

So Angela yielded: only, she requested that from the legal document of her election should be expunged the title of Foundress which had been set down there.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> The textual words of the document.

<sup>62</sup> Salvatori, p. 55. Girelli. § 32.

<sup>63</sup> Salvatori, p. 55, *Girelli*, § 39.

The Company was, after all, her one treasure, and with remarkable tenderness and warmth did she pour out her spirit upon it. In her writings is to be found no proof that a life of severe self-denial, a life of aloofness and metaphysical absorption necessarily breeds lack of balance in the nature of a human being. Austerity never chilled the heart of Angela Merici. Reading the written word she left behind her for these same women, one can easily imagine the speech with which as Mother-elect she addressed on this occasion, the family now legally her own. "I beg of you, — by the Passion of Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the merits of His Holy Mother, to receive with submission the counsels I am going to give you, to put them into practice, and never to depart from them. They are inspired by my devotedness to you, and after my death they will be an unfailing testimony of my tender affection for all the Company."<sup>64</sup>

After the exciting scene of her election everyone was happy, whereupon the Assembly proceeded to fill the minor offices of the Company, according to the Rule. Angela herself chose as her Assistant in office Lucrezia Lodrone, the eminently respected widow of Count Ettore Lodrone, a lady whose judgment she had relied upon for some time, while her virtue had long been an inspiration in Brescia. The Countess, however, being already one of the four elected Lady Governors, chosen to preside over four sections of the city, Angela proposed that they fill the Countess' place of Governor by the selection of Caterina Meja, who, with three other widows, should divide the city into four-part jurisdiction. The other three were as follows:

GENEVIEVE — widow of Alessandro Luzzago,

MARIA — widow of Paolo Avogadro,

URSULA — widow of Geronimo Gavardo.

Subsequent to this meeting, however, four lady Governors proved to be not enough, so Angela, as Mother General, appointed four more:

VERONICA BUZZI

LIONELLA PEDIZOCCA

GIOVANNA MONTI

ELISABETTA PRATO.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Salvatori, p. 207, also *Spirit of St. Angela*, 34.

<sup>65</sup> See Salvatori, p. 55.

Next, the Foundress drew the attention of the ladies to a matter which she deemed of vital importance, namely, the permanent direction of its spiritual affairs. How were they to secure unanimity of action and especially of spirit, when the members were widely separated in residence and occupation, and when they were a group of women in which was recognized no class distinction? It was her desire that this function of central spiritual-guidance be placed in the hands of two well known Brescian ecclesiastics, Don Paolo, of Cremona, Canon Regular of Lateran, and D. Crysante, Canon of St. Peter, of the Order of St. George in Alga; so the ladies at once agreed to elect these two men for this purpose. Under the jurisdiction of the bishop, the two priests laid a firm foundation for the spiritual conduct of the Company, and inaugurated in those first years a series of illustrious Directors,<sup>66</sup> who guided the young institute through the formative time of its infancy. Thus, to that early assembly of 1537 the custom dates back, of having a special Ecclesiastical Superior to watch over both spiritual and external interests of the Ursuline Order, one of the characteristics peculiar to the Institute, the tradition of which was respected by Rome in erecting the Ursuline Monastery of Paris, by Bull of 1612,<sup>67</sup> so that the practice continues to the present day to bear the impress of the Foundress' original idea.

## XI

Enthusiasm for the new society was spreading by this time throughout Brescia until the young Company of St. Ursula was become the marvel of its day. Meantime, Angela herself, calm in the sunset glow of the work achieved, satisfied, turned to that East whence she longed for light of eternity was at last to be found.

If she had intended her institute to be a local society she might have rested content here with the approbation of the Ordinary: "Oh! that all the world might come under the shadow of this Rule!" she had once exclaimed. So now it was the action fitted to the wish: for in order that the Company of St. Ursula might expand, might develop in unknown future ways, might last until the

<sup>66</sup> *Regola*, Chap. XII, Salvatori, p. 173.

<sup>67</sup> *Postel, op. cit.*, I, 313.



end of time, and spread to all the world, she deemed it important to obtain for it the formal approval of the head of the Church Universal. The first thing she proceeded to do then upon her election to the office of Mother General was to prepare a petition to the Holy See for this great end. She confided to Cozzano her ideas and her desires in the matter, and left it to him to draw up a petition to Rome. It is a pity that this petition has not come down to posterity.

"The petition," says Cozzano, "was written by my hand: but its contents came from the Holy Spirit through the Foundress."<sup>68</sup> Still, although the petition was drawn up in all due form and dispatched to Rome, the author was destined to die without the consolation of receiving the Papal Bull, which was dated four years after her death.

She survived only three years her election as Superior and Mother General, brief space, in which to survey her work in its actuality. It is easy to conceive how in the first generation of her daughters, the traditions of those happy days must have been garnered up. With what a tender radiance the life of the little Company was transfused from out her room, wherein she ordered all things benignantly with the Divine science of sanctity. With what fresh eagerness her ladies hastened to and fro on their daily missions of charity and teaching with her smile to cheer and reward them. How proudly the demure young girls of the Company bore themselves, when anyone asked, "Are you, too, of the new Company of the Verginella?"

## XII

She foreknew the day and the hour of her passing, still, there was much to be done, as the time was growing short. Her plan she had laid out; she had now organized the workers; she had placed them under the protection of the supreme authority; yet the very pith and marrow of her project existed only in the mind of the genius that had conceived it. She had given the body, but had not yet revealed the true soul; the letter was there, but not yet the spirit.

This she desired to embody in separate written form, to be given

<sup>68</sup> Salvatori, p. 57.

to her children under the most solemn and impressive circumstances. It was no other than the unique document known as *Angela Merici's Counsels and Spiritual Testament*. In these last years, therefore, between the intervals of active direction of her ladies and their young charges, she spent many hours in conference with her secretary, Gabriel Cozzano, whom she entrusted with this important task, the last of her life. Realizing that her final hour was now fast approaching, she dictated to him her *Testament*,<sup>69</sup> which like a swan song replete with the glow and beauty of her soul goes on singing down the ages. Cozzano drew up the precious document and laid it carefully away to be read to the General Chapter of the Company of Saint Ursula, after its author should be gone from among them.

"I am going out of this world," she bade him write; "and I leave you in my place: I beg and implore you, by the Passion and Blood of Jesus Christ shed for love of us that you will put into practice with utmost care, these few mementos."<sup>70</sup>

Not content with this legacy of inspired direction, she added an appendix under the title of *Counsels*,<sup>71</sup> which were addressed to the Superiors, and in part to all the sisters. These seemed, even more than the first, to have been inspired from on high; in fact, Lombardi testified that Angela was wrapped in ecstasy<sup>72</sup> all the while she was dictating these pages, apparently out of her senses, forgetting that anyone was present. Meanwhile she continued her accustomed mode of life in her poor apartment at St. Afra's, where in spite of her advanced age, and the many demands made upon her time and thoughts by the working-order of the Company, the coming and going of many people, she practiced the ordinary virtues of domestic life, together with Barbara Fontana and another, Girolama Buschi, who shared her intimacy. Girolama was the first member of the

<sup>69</sup> Of this many copies exist both in MSS. and print. Salvatori reports that he keeps to the original writing of G. Cozzano, under the signature of the Saint, legally certified and bound in the *Processo Folio 1377* and exhibited in the S. Cong. of Rites in the *Summario of her Position in Virtue*, 198.

<sup>70</sup> *Testament*, Salvatori, p. 200.

<sup>71</sup> On file in the *Processo Folio*, as described above, for *Testament*.

<sup>72</sup> Girelli quotes L. § 42;

Venerable Mother Margaret of St. Xavier of the Ursulines of Dijon used to advise her nuns, especially superiors, to keep always with them, *St. Angela's Testament and Counsels*: some of these carried them always and after death a copy was put in their hands in the coffin. Girelli, § 42.

Company to die after Angela. She is called Blessed. But had she not been privileged to drink at the source, the spirit of the Foundress?

Salvatori describes Angela, as she looked at the close of her life. She was of medium height, inclined to be short, thin in body, which could not have been otherwise, for from childhood she was inured to most rigid and constant fasting: she was fair of complexion, smiling of aspect, but modest; gay in conversation, though always controlled in her manner, which made it a pleasure to see and talk to her even at an advanced age; in company she engendered respect and devotion.

One can visit the small room at St. Afra's today where she spent these last busy days of her life. You can enter from a small court and go up a narrow staircase. You go in and find a little room where she and her two companions held their slim *ménage*, opening into a larger room about thirty feet long and ten wide, in which the first reunions were held, and where now, in the days when the Prato Oratory was the Company's rendezvous, Angela might have received all the different persons who were constantly pressing upon her on various errands. The benches they used to sit upon are still there. An altar has been placed upon the spot where she lay in death; there are a few pictures, and there is an inscription to indicate that in this room was once organized a society which bore the stamp of a great and spiritual genius.<sup>73</sup>

IN THIS POOR ROOM LIVED AND DIED  
 THE ILLUSTRIOUS VIRGIN ANGELA MERICI  
 HERE SHE SENT UP TO GOD THE ASPIRATION AND LOVE OF HER HEART  
 HERE THERE CAME TO SEEK THIS UNLEARNED WOMAN  
 AS TO A SCHOOL OF CELESTIAL DOCTRINE  
 THE THEOLOGAINS OF THOSE UNHAPPY TIMES  
 WHEN ERROR WAS EVERYWHERE  
 HERE GATHERING IN HER FELLOW TOWNSWOMEN  
 ANGELA FOUNDED THAT HOLY INSTITUTE  
 WHICH MORE FLOURISHING THAN EVER AFTER THREE CENTURIES  
 UPON THE CHURCH AND UPON SOCIETY  
 EXHALES THE EFFLUENCE OF ITS LABORS

<sup>73</sup> The altar contains part of the Saint's coffin. Girelli, § 37.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ANGELA, TEACHER OF TEACHERS

#### I



ON the walls of St. Afra's church today, hangs a quaint picture of Angela Merici seated in the midst of her Lady Governors, prim, rather majestic women, with long straight draperies, large white kerchiefs around their shoulders, and plain white caps showing their hair. Countess Luzzago is there, and the Lady Maria Avogadro, and to the right, with the dignity which always accompanies simplicity, Elisabetta Prato. These, perhaps, are portraitures, representing the widow countesses who lent impress and seriousness to Angela's project before the eyes of the Brescian public, that public which is said to have been conspicuous for a traditional intelligence and sanctity among its women.

Never, perhaps, was project which more imperatively required sanction from just such a class of women as look out sweetly from this old painting.

The Foundress sits very erect in their midst, the centre of interest. Tall she appears, perhaps because so straight, slight, and worn with age, sweet of expression, her dark eyes very attractive. She is distinguished in dress by a white veil instead of the cap worn by the others; her hair is not seen, and the veil falls in soft short folds to her shoulders. There she sits in the somber light of the ancient limner, enthroned, as it were, with a significance that speaks like a clarion.

The meaning of the faded old picture bears inspection and study. It is not without keen insight that this artist, instead of placing a child at Angela's knee, set these ladies in stately array around her, she herself, with lifted finger essaying to make clear some principle which they were to put into effect.

Of the great personalities in that flashing Renaissance epoch, most of the brilliant women of Italy, curiously enough, were born con-



temporaries of Angela Merici,<sup>1</sup> yet which of them produced creative work such as is ascribed to the woman of St. Afra's, her whose delicate feminine form and glowing eyes are framed in no cap and gown? One looks in vain through lists of Italian women of historical distinction for the unobtrusive name of Angela Merici. True, many lives went out in darkness then as now, because they were so far in advance of their own time, just as conversely in every walk of life there are to be met people who really belong to the generation before the last.

Much has been said, many volumes written of late years, on the women of the Italian Renaissance, but what creations other than those brought to public attention by the saints of the age, have those famous ladies really initiated? What living work today can be ascribed to them? It would be hard indeed to find.

Herbert Spencer, discussing the sexes, has drawn attention to the fact that the reflective faculty in woman deals quickly and clearly with the personal and the special and immediate, but that she more rarely grasps the general and impersonal. He compares the respective behavior of father and mother towards the children, in which the mother thinks of present effects, whereas the father represses the promptings of sympathy with a view to the ultimate benefit. And therein, concludes this critic of life, women as a class are satisfied, more than men, in seeking what seems an immediate public good, without thought of distant public evils. Now, it is the reverse of this that constituted Angela Merici's genius. In the power to act otherwise she showed her creative gift and in her manner of doing it her supernatural inspiration. For she seems to have grasped four centuries ago what a modern writer has so aptly expressed in remarking that woman with the training of voters in her hands is greater than the voter, if she but knew it. This, then, is what the old painter implied in painting around the Foundress, not little children, but a group of teachers, as though with far gaze upon the distant ultimate benefit, she seemed almost to overlook present detail.

<sup>1</sup> De Maulde la Claviere calls attention to the number of famous Italian women born between 1454 and 1490. See *Women of the Renaissance*.

## II

From the eighth to the fourteenth century, all useful arts of womankind were to be sought for in the monasteries.<sup>2</sup> However, with the rise of universities there came a new note into human thought, destined to revolutionize the whole world of intellectual endeavor, namely, the note of individualism, the development, as the Humanist expressed it, of the perfect individual; in other words, the Renaissance of Europe. Like the breaking up of ice on the stream of European life, the Crusades began the tremendous impetus, and thereafter followed the movement toward a fresh social impulse which, once astir, swept through the bonds of the Feudal System, uprooted old traditions, and broadened out the channel for modern life. With every phase of society profoundly affected and every class alert with new ambitions, the western horizon opening its gates upon illimitable shores where the rainbow hope seemed to leave its pot of gold at every man's feet, and personal opportunity became the universal watchword . . . in such an hour, what wonder that men should take thought concerning their children.

Characteristic of the moment there had arisen during the Renaissance a new and unorganized army of teachers, free intellectual lances scattered all over the continent, who, with more or less earnestness of purpose, were reaching out for new and better ways of training the young. And nowhere more than in Italy was this interest apparent. Accordingly, by the time Angela Merici had matured her plans, a dozen Italian pedagogues had written dissertations upon the ethics of family life and the rearing of children, a dozen ingenious teachers had set their hand to working out experiments along newer lines. Of such writers was B. Giovanni Dominici of Florence,<sup>3</sup> and of such teachers was Vittorino da Feltre of Padua.

The atmosphere of northern Italy was pretty well charged with enthusiasm for the new pedagogy at the moment when little Angela

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *infra*, Chap. III.

<sup>3</sup> B. Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiare*, illustrate con noti del Prof. Donato Salvi, Firenze, 1860. Dominici, 1356-1420. Vittorino da Feltre, 1378-1446.

first saw the light at Desenzano. Dominici and Vittorino had but recently died, while during her girlhood were published the educational treatises of Leon Battista Alberti,<sup>4</sup> with those of Aeneas Sylvius, Battista Guarino, who, by the way, wrote his for one of the Gambaras of Brescia, and last, Maffeo Vegio, perhaps the finest of them all. Men like Agostino Dati, Ivani, Barbaro, and Cardinal Sadoletto, had added their ideas to the sum of the age's mental content when this girl, as yet in her early womanhood, first betook her to working out the same problem.

Dominici's treatise, entitled *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiare*, printed as early as 1404, gives authoritative light upon the views of girls' education as the early Renaissance Italian conceived it. His teaching was thoroughly practical and thoroughly Christian, conservative, of the broad-minded type. Both he and Vittorino viewed education from the right moral centre of religion.

"The child," said Dominici, writing at the request of a certain Florentine lady who looked to him for advice, "the child is to be trained according to a fivefold consideration: God, his father and mother, himself, the Republic, and his fortunes. But to the first may be reduced the other four."<sup>5</sup>

In fine, the thesis of this book may be expressed:

"All which man has comes from God and must be rendered back to Him again."

He emphasized strongly the respect for authority which is the basis of the Church's teachings:

"If you wish to govern your children well, teach them the great debt they owe these parents according to the precept of God, of nature, and of the human sense of justice and human law."

Dominici held that the child must be taught to appreciate and be grateful for correction. He advocated silence and respect in the parents' presence.

From the first, the Church, early mistress of psychology, had

<sup>4</sup> Alberti, 1404-1472, *Il Trattato della cura della Famiglia*. Aeneas Sylvius, 1405-1564, *De Liberorum educatione*. Guarino, 1374-1460, *De ordine docendi et studendi*. Maffeo Vegio, *De educatione puerorum et eorum claris moribus*, Milan, 1491. Dati, 1421-1479, "great work as an instructor," . . . Cf. Pastor V 30. Ivani, 1450-1550, *Del Governo della famiglie civile*. Barbaro, 1398-1454, *De Re Uxoriam*, 1513. Sadoletto, 1477-1547.

<sup>5</sup> Dominici, *op. cit.*

based her religious pedagogy upon sense training, and so Dominici was giving nothing new when he advised the use of pictures for the little girls of the Alberti family.

"Have pictures painted in your house, or have statues of holy children represented in attitudes and surroundings attractive to childhood: Jesus at His Mother's breast, Jesus in the lap of His Mother, John the Baptist dressed in leopard skins, or Jesus with the infant John the Evangelist. You might familiarize the children with pictures of the Eleven Thousand Virgins, running about, fleeing or struggling with the Huns; Agnes with her lamb, or Cecilia crowned with roses, Elizabeth carrying her basket. Teach them in this way admiration for purity, contempt for vanity, and the very beginnings of contemplation itself."

Then he proceeded to the other senses.

In discussing schools, Dominici warned the mother to be watchful especially over the morals of her boys, under the bad influences which prevailed at the time, despite the best efforts of the school-master. The first instruction was to be in Christian Doctrine; and if they were to be given anything else, let it be the morality of Cato, the fables of Aesop, the teachings of Boethius, the sciences of Prospero as treated by St. Augustine. He warned against Ovid's writings and the exaggerated interest in pagan mythology then coming so rapidly into vogue.

This broad-minded monk insisted that the children, and particularly the boys, be trained carefully as citizens of the Republic of Florence, which he declared had great need of workers, defenders, governors.

"Let them not be Guelfs nor Ghibellines, but Florentines."

He reminded the Florentine mother that their native state needed a threefold defence, namely the sword, speech and prayer.

"Then have your children, each one, say every day an Ave Maria, a Pater Noster, and a Miserere, for the good of the state, not forgetting that they are destined for the immortal citizenship of Heaven, rather than of this world."<sup>6</sup>

Singularly enough B. Dominici ended his treatise with reference to St. Ursula, "con la dolce turba sua."

<sup>6</sup> Dominici, *Regola del Governo di Cura Familiare*, op. cit.



There is small doubt that the very religious book of Dominici found its way into Angela's hands or those of her companions, so closely she seems to sympathize with some of his thought.<sup>7</sup>

### III

All the early Renaissance books naturally began with family life, and proposed to be little more than regulations for the government of a family. In the eyes of the traditional Italian burgher, the mother had long been considered the educator, with duty limited to the daily round of domestic affairs and the careful observance of religion, unless perhaps in exceptional circles which demanded the arts of conversation and some slight literary knowledge. But when Renaissance influences began to affect the family itself, a hot dispute arose among dilettanti as to whether or not the mother ought to be the head of the family, whether the father were not in truth the legitimate preceptor, the centre of education.

The exalted ideal of woman, realized perfectly in the Blessed Virgin Mary as prototype, and heroically in the Church's woman-saints, began to be overshadowed, through the revival of the classics, by the pagan concept of woman's position in the home. The Humanists, in the exhilaration over their great catch of the pagan culture, must needs like Brother Juniper, cram into the pot, fowl, feathers, and all. With unconscious absorption of the pagan ideas they proceeded to set forth the old principle of *Paterna Potesta* of the ancients, particularly of the Romans; in other words, Father-Direction, instead of Mother-Direction, received now the stress.

In fine, there grew to be a sort of feeling abroad that with the New Man in view, woman's function in life and her fitness for that function was, for the present at least, vaguely unsatisfactory! Thereupon appeared a veritable small army of wiseacres who took up the cudgels quite seriously in defense of woman until the title "*Difesa di Donne*" came to be imprinted on many a volume of contemporary prose and verse, ranging from ire to satire. Whatever theory might have been held as to woman's inferiority, the fact is, in

<sup>7</sup> Peddie, in his *Printing in Brescia*, states that Dominici's book was in Brescia before the close of the fifteenth century, as were also those of Guarino and Vergerio.

those ages, she was, in practice, undoubtedly the recognized subordinate of her husband. That she was more or less circumscribed might have been due largely to the municipal conditions, ill paved streets, lack of lights, small protection against weather, inconvenient travelling, insecurity from robbers, and the like, — a quasi-material hedge. But there is very little in biography, letters, hagiography, or historical fact to support the rather sweeping statement of Biagi in his *Private Life of the Florentines* during the Renaissance, to the effect that the mediaeval housewife of Pre-Renaissance days had been either a virago with a masculine mind, or else a domestic slave, with no understanding beyond her prayers and her pantry.

Ivani, in his early treatise, summarized her duties thus: to love, honor and support her husband, and to show herself affable to his friends; to control the household; to be bright and clean, avoiding quarrels with the neighbors, on the contrary, rather, seeking good companionship. Gianozza, the husband-hero in Ivani's book, rising from prayer with his wife remarked, "Nothing we have prayed for is as important to our sons, as is your modesty!"<sup>8</sup>

Alberti considered woman subordinate by reason of physique and temperament; "for woman," he pointed out, "is by nature passive, shrinking and unstable."<sup>9</sup> He rated her discretion low, but Castiglione on the other hand defended the gentle sex, claiming that woman knows so much better how to control and apply the powers she possesses.<sup>10</sup> Ivani had said that the sensible wife does not try to know her husband's secrets; Alberti went much farther than this: "Let her be kept out," was his thesis. For instance, he represented Gianozza showing his young wife his house.

"I let her into my rooms and *behind locked doors* showed her all the valuables, silver, precious stones, with their locked receptacles. It is not well for the whole family to know your affairs."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> In Ivani's letter, which was sometimes read at weddings, are set forth the beautiful customs of the cultured Italians, christenings, weddings, and family feasts. Published for the first time in 1821.

<sup>9</sup> Ivani's dialogue is so much like Alberti's; this and the fact that Alberti's works on family life were found among his books might suggest plagiarism. Rösler, *Dominicis*, p. 221.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Wm. Harrison Woodward, *Education during the Renaissance*, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> P. Augustin Rösler, *Dominicis Erziehungslehre und die pädagogischen Leistungen Italiens im 15 Jahrhundert*, p. 222 seq.

His manuscripts and those of his forefathers Gianozza kept hid from his wife; he kept them safe in his study, and there his wife never came, neither with him nor alone. Gianozza discouraged her asking too many questions about himself. In short, no secret to any woman! As many of the young wives of Italy at that time were little more than twelve years old, the sight of locked drawers and locked doors, we must admit, might not have been without a certain salutary effect. Perhaps such iron resolution on the part of her husband might not have been necessary except for the traditional human experience that her insinuations were bound eventually to discover, woman-like, from him, man-like, those weighty secrets. And so — Alberti, in brief, was of the opinion that the father is the real patriarch of the family.

Cardinal Sadoletto, a third contemporary, inclined to the same view.

"The centre of the house," said he, "is the father. The influence of woman-kind upon children at home is not very good."

Here, we touch, so to speak, upon the dynamics of the dispute which, no doubt, our own century approaches indulgently, much as one might brush off the dust from an old sedan chair. It was the absence of organized schools of a satisfactory type that compelled the Cardinal to advise an education conducted at home, in an orderly way, quiet and dignified, without loud emphasis or harshness. This author blamed the mother for being unwilling to force upon boys any standard beyond self-gratification. But in the household where the father's word was law, the Cardinal did not seem to perceive that the mother's being deprived of responsibility was the very reason why her control of the children necessarily ended in indulgence. So said his opponents.<sup>12</sup>

The pith and marrow of the entire question was pointed out by Vives, the famous tutor of the English royal household, when he remarked that so many women were difficult and morose, fond of dress and absorbed in trifles, alternately arrogant and subject. "This," argued he, "is because of their lack of sound interests such as the trained intellect provides. Much I have marvelled,

<sup>12</sup> Woodward, *op. cit.*, pp. 169, 170.

as I often do, at the oversight of men, who never cease to complain of women's condition; and yet, having the education of them in their own hands, they not only do little diligence to teach them and bring them up better, but they purposely withdraw them from learning. This fault is too over-largely spread to be shortly remedied."<sup>13</sup>

The sage Vives, himself, was not unmindful of how the distaff ruled the world. He advocated for mental training "Quintilian, to be taught in a girl's fifth year"; still he pronounced "the dressing of wool an honest occupation for women . . . nor let nobody loathe the name of kitchen, namely, being a thing very necessary, without the which neither sick folks mend, nor whole folks live!"

With Vives the learned Erasmus agreed,<sup>14</sup> deploring the home influence exerted upon the children by frivolous, uneducated women. He denounced indolence in the home. The fuller life the better; but the great Dutch teacher, "Erasmus, my darling," as Sir Thomas More was pleased to call him, had in his mind's eye as objective, not the mother's need nor the welfare of her sex, be it known, but the need of the boys. Some forty or fifty years before, Dominici had urged that the mother's responsibility demanded of her some good measure of mental power, inasmuch as it was her duty to see that the property her children were to inherit be preserved intact.

Those who were in favor of woman's higher education specified that she would thus be able to keep her own household accounts and write to her husband without employing a secretary. On the other hand it was complained that if she should learn to read and write, she would be sure to be idling her time over the enchanting pages of Boccaccio, or perhaps dillydallying in loose letters, the fashion of the day.

"No," warned Vespasiano da Bisticci, "do not give them the Hundred Tales; these are not suitable for pure minds which ought only to love God and their husbands."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Juan Luis Vives, 1492-1590. See Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>14</sup> Erasmus, 1466-1536. See Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>15</sup> Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 206. seq.



And so the controversy went on. Vittorino da Feltre was the very first advocate for educational equality of the sexes.<sup>16</sup>

#### IV

Now, consciously or unconsciously, Angela Merici's movement in Brescia was a reactionary reform against the pagan ideals imported through the Humanists into the education of girls. Her movement may be clearly defined as a reaction in which the Mother-idea according to Christian tradition was to be re-emphasized and made workable.

Together with Dominici and the older generation, she vigorously insisted that both the citadel of education and the end of education is in the home . . . the home as the basic unit; and that only by purifying and uplifting the home could society be rejuvenated, and that this is the peculiar work of woman. Dominici had told with rather a monotonous patience and with little real genius what the children are to do, what the parents are to do. Angela with quickened vision outruns him, and tells what young people think and feel, and what is to be done about it. The few brief pages in which she wrote out her instructions reflect but inconsiderable learning from the human point of view: she quotes no written work except the Bible, and that sparingly: the only school to which she makes reference is God's own teachings of the human race. Her *Counsels* read as the utterance of a simple, clear, strong mind: the voice of a daughter of the people, you would pronounce it to be, at first hearing. Still, the pages bear intensive study. And soon one begins to realize what a student of the greater book of humanity itself was the daughter of John Merici, Notable of Desenzano.

Her women, and all the young girls who knelt in the candle-lighted room on that night when Gabriel Cozzano first read her *Counsels* aloud, at the bedside of their dying teacher, were deeply impressed above all with the spiritual character of her legacy, as though that were its main import: and yet, none the less, may the modern psychologist who takes pains to thread his own way through her little

<sup>16</sup> Woodward, *Vittorino da Feltre and other Humanist Educators*, Cambridge, 1905.

book, find himself rather astonished at the prematurity of her pedagogical principles.

Then there was Vittorino. The daughters of the Gonzaga family, as well as its sons, were under the tutelage of the famous Vittorino da Feltre, whose school had enormous influence. With ideas that were fresh and new, Providence had placed this man in the happiest of situations, and Vittorino, perhaps the most famous of Humanist pedagogues, was thoroughly Catholic, engrafting in his teachings the wisdom of the ancient classics upon the root-stock of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> He believed in religion and good example. Carefully he tutored the children in Latin and Greek, working steadily towards the development of their individuality, with high standards of refinement and courtesy, cultivating voice, intonation, and gesture, to lead these young people to a physical excellence and noble bearing worthy of their station in life. Vittorino's system of physical culture was particularly detailed. Above and beyond any inspiration furnished from books, Vittorino seemed to value the discipline of the playing fields, upon which he always counted for strengthening a child's will power, his sincerity, and his sense of modesty. Outdoors then the children had ball-play, running and jumping, and after the age of ten, regular training exercises, such as archery and fencing, as well as first military training. Then too they delighted in riding, hunting, swimming, fishing, hawking and snaring birds, and in order to produce in the young a dignified carriage and walk there were certain special gymnastics.

Vittorino with his disciples, notable among whom was Gabriel Concorregio of Brescia, whose contact with Angela has already been noted, established educational systems of considerable detail. Their point of view was new, indisputably excellent, suitable in every respect, a fresh momentum, departing from the mediaeval, while for the most part, retaining the mediaeval religious basis; although these masters had to make one sacrifice, of inestimable value; for who could evaluate the effect of monastic solemnity, the order, the precedent, the spiritual and aesthetic influence of its symbolism, which always accompanies monastic life like a lofty language?

Vittorino and his compeers took a great step forward. Yet none

<sup>17</sup> Woodward, *ibid.*, 206 seq.

of these achieved what Angela Merici achieved. She went straight to the psychology of her subject. She analyzed the youthful mind. It was her aim to make the young girl happy, and out of happiness to elicit sympathy for others and the spontaneity of social service. Secondarily, she regulated the exterior. With Vittorino, she believed in utilizing the home atmosphere and its native influences: she proposed to gather children, as he did, under the home roof of the teacher, and with him she focussed all training in the individual. Both Vittorino da Feltro and Angela Merici were really following out the traditional method of Mother Church: they were not either one blinded by the Humanistic notion, for the Greek conception of personality was essentially deficient, whereas the Christian, on the other hand, had its origin not in any abstract speculations about virtues, but in the actual concrete life of a Person who was absolutely perfect, surpassing any conceivable ideal.<sup>18</sup>

## V

Angela Merici's method consequently, in dealing with the young, is in keeping with all the best Renaissance standards, preëminently personal;

"I beseech you to have each and every one of your sisters, individually, in your heart, not merely their names, but their present circumstances, their dispositions, in fact, their whole being."<sup>19</sup>

On this point, the Ursuline tradition has never been lost sight of, no matter what has been the swerving of the pedagogic tide. The Ursuline point of view and practice has always been individualistic; from its fountain spring in the Middle Ages, personal training of the single child, and not as mind alone, but as an entity, a moral being, is the strong point of the Order. There is no one-sidedness in Angela's scheme of training: the radicalism of youth, with the "suppressed desires" which form the rallying cry of modern schools, were not ignored by her. These she names over one by one as will be seen, points out their lawful objects, their abuse, and so provides for their legitimate satisfaction and their proper guidance, that in

<sup>18</sup> Pace, E. A., *Education, Catholic Encyc.* Vol. 5, p. 301.

<sup>19</sup> *Testament*, 2nd Bequest.

the hands of this inspired teacher, the "suppressed desires" of the False Humanist, become the "controlled desires" of a well balanced Christian.

As a human document then, the striking feature of Angela's *Counsels* is her grasp of feminine psychology. From this point of view her *Counsels* are unique. Secondary to this, in both value and historic interest, ranks her intuitive application of what is known today as pedagogical principles. Compared with her, the modern pedagogue becomes quite as bourgeois as the famous Monsieur Jourdain,<sup>20</sup> discovering that he had been speaking prose all his life and had not known it! Thus her early venture in the field is not lacking in interest even beside so full an undergrowth as that of the twentieth century. Realizing that the special need of her day was sound Christian Doctrine and pure social life centred at the home fireside, she proposed to train the young girl to be the inspiration of her adventurous brothers, the silent check upon her passionate father, the angel at the threshold holding the flashing sword of God's truth.

For this reason the first step Angela considered was the regulation of the affections. The company of St. Ursula, thought she, must be the glowing hearth from which a great fire was to be kindled. There must be love in the society, rulers loving their subjects, these loving superiors and each other. In Angela's mind this affection was to be based upon the ethical value of character, the esteem of good qualities,<sup>21</sup> and spiritualized by the grand motive of their common work, namely, the glory of God and good of souls. Superiors were directed to study their subjects with sympathetic devotedness that would inspire confidence and affection in the young. The Foundress understood how a woman's life is the life of the affections, and so she proceeded to lay out ways along which these affections could spontaneously flow, "irrigating the dry places of the world." For how otherwise shall one love God whom one has not seen if one loves not the neighbor one sees? It was with vigorous good sense that she sought to strengthen the supernatural bond of spiritual life: "Spiritual love is incomparably more potent than natural love,"<sup>22</sup> wrote

<sup>20</sup> Molière, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.

<sup>21</sup> "Quanto piu le apprezzarete, tanto piu le amarete." *Counsels*, Intr.

<sup>22</sup> *Testament*, Leg. 2, Salvatori, p. 200.



she, remembering that the roots of this relation reach to the spiritual foundations of existence, and that its rending is so much the greater wrench as the qualities of natural and supernatural added together, surpass the merely human.

In fifteen different passages of her *Counsels* and *Testament* does she urge the positive necessity of affection,<sup>23</sup> for "from a mind and heart grounded upon charity, only good and holy works proceed." She seems to fear the results of little love far more than those of overweening affection, and in this she shows the true reading of womanly nature. Even in urging impartiality nowhere does she seem to discountenance affection for fear of discord and division.

"Cherish an equal love for all your daughters, having no more marked affection for one than for the other."<sup>24</sup>

The great need of mutual support and union she holds ever before their eyes, having laid the ground for it in a *Rule* that is marvelously ingenious.

"My last words, which I repeat, I address to you as a prayer I would feign write in my blood, namely that you cherish concord, having but one heart and one will."<sup>25</sup>

When she asked them thus strongly, passionately, to preserve union and concord, did she suppose they could always perfectly agree? No, her wisdom was wiser than that. She knew they would agree only by heroic effort and the strong grace of God. She was aware that there must be clashing in all human things, but she wished her children to cling together and to rise above it. Those in her Company of Saint Ursula who were teachers of the young were mostly girls in their late teens or early twenties; so in her *Rule*, *Counsels* and *Testament*, Angela bade the Governors, who were older women, study the young girl-nature, and gauge their direction by its needs. Her advice to them was detailed, clear, and insistent. The method was not intended to make the young unconsciously like the old, neither was it an inconsiderate system of moral control; it was based upon the needs and resources of the young nature to

<sup>23</sup> *Testament*, 1st Bequest.

<sup>24</sup> *Counsels*, 8th, Sal., p. 214.

<sup>25</sup> *Counsels*, 9th, Sal., p. 214.

which it was to be applied. The physical, mental and moral needs of the adolescent were to be looked after in Angela's idea, and thus she fulfilled a conception of education which is claimed as a product of an age four centuries later than hers.

## VI

Contemporaneous with that Renaissance struggle for individuality which eventually overstressed the senses and led to education by doing, — the modern overworked conception, — in which the teacher effaces himself in order to let the child work everything out for itself, — Angela's movement centred, conversely, in the active influence of the adult mind exerting itself upon the growing child.<sup>26</sup> Hers was a reaction in favor of the Mother-Idea. She considered the Mother of paramount importance in the structure of society and though she acknowledged the foibles of her age and sex, she alone of all the Renaissance pedagogues indicated how to overcome these.

Angela did not think she was asserting a new philosophy in the training of the young. On the contrary, she advised strongly against making just such a mistake. It was in the new so-called philosophies that she scented danger. In her *7th Counsel* she bids her teachers:

"Let them go their way. . . . It is better to follow that which is certain, without danger, than the uncertain, with danger."<sup>27</sup>

"Follow the ancient path and usage of the Church, ordered and confirmed by so many saints under inspiration of the Holy Ghost; and make a new life."

She was philosophical because she followed logically the dictates of right reason. To progress securely she seems to have felt that one

<sup>26</sup> "Education is the fostering, directive and instructive influence of the adult person on the development of the adolescent child, in order to help it share the common and established goods of the natural and the supernatural life." Doctor Otto Willmann, *Lexicon der Paedagogik*, S. V. Erziehung.

<sup>27</sup> Salvatori, p. 213; cf. *Willmann-Kirsch*, Vol. II, 399: "Education has more reasons than most other sciences for accepting historic continuity in its researches, because all educational systems are by their very nature, directed more toward the future than the past, with the hope of making new discoveries; so that educationists as a rule are loth to recognize the achievements of the past and slow to combine them with the endeavors of the present." Vol. I, 44.

must join what one has acquired with what one has received from tradition; and in order not to overestimate the new, one must hold fast to the old in the new; equally, in order not to underestimate the new, one must remember the age-old problems that are still awaiting solution. Her *7th Counsel* emphasizes this.

Angela adapted her pedagogical principles to her times; but there is no doubt that prevailing educational theories helped shape her thought. The ideals of the Renaissance were born largely of influences springing from salons and social circles and arising from the age's own needs. Now no one knew better than she the spirit of the salons in her day and while her own ideal sprang rather from a genius akin to that of the artist and vivified by heavenly inspiration, she proceeded to set forth very clearly, in the choice of her ladies, in her *Rule*, and in her *Counsels* the tangible types in which she proposed to clothe those ideals, betraying therein that she was a woman of true Renaissance blood.

It is very striking how she elicited from her officers a peculiar esteem for the high positions in the Company, indeed a certain enthusiasm for them, albeit built upon a spiritual motive, and controlled by just estimates of their fitness. Be it remembered that she was legislating for busy women in the world. The high places having been made attractive from a supernatural standpoint to the Brescian women of desirable qualities, the younger members would thus always have before them the prospect of association with the worthy and the admired.

"Oh, how grateful you should be," she reminded her ladies, again and again. Then she would proceed to recall to them gravely their responsibilities. The subtle preceptress built upon the psychological fact that nothing so stimulates a woman to her best as the feeling that people believe that she can actually do it.<sup>28</sup> How well this

<sup>28</sup> "Without people being conscious of the fact, one of the foundation stones of moral culture has been the living presence of great personalities illustrating in their own lives the highest degree of spiritual freedom." No one applied better than Angela what Dr. Willmann teaches in the following passage: "This personal element is needed in all ideals, but is a special requirement in educational ideals. There can be no type of idealized mental culture without strong and striking personalities serving as models, *i.e.*, celebrated teachers, great masters, harmonious natures, in a word, such men as unite in themselves what is scattered in the consciousness of the race." *Willmann-Kirsch*, II, 38.

strategist of the Company of Saint Ursula contrived so that even the very weaknesses of human nature were seized upon and supernaturalized, to lead to very noble ends! This sprang doubtless from her long years of experience, and the worldly wisdom she naturally accumulated during the wearisome delay which she had to endure, before opportunity came her way.

She appealed particularly to the maternal instinct in her teachers, and that, three whole centuries before Pestalozzi. She reminded them how to the mother each child is the only one:

"If they had a thousand sons and daughters, every one of them would be always in their minds;"<sup>29</sup> how the mother delights to clothe the child with attractions:

"si veden le madre temporale poner tanta cura, et sforzo in acconzare, in adornare, et polire a tante varie fozze le sue carnale figliole."<sup>30</sup>

She is an eagle in protecting; tireless in ministrations and unfailing in love:

"Above all, let the one who is selected Superior have the reputation of charity and tender kindness among the daughters of our Company, so that she may meet their needs with a mother's heart full of love;"<sup>31</sup>

thus, for the Superior towards the Company and the teachers towards the children:

"Think that you really have more need of serving them, than they have of being served. . . . Keep in touch with their needs, spiritual and temporal; if you have not the wherewith to relieve them, go to the higher officers. Deprive yourself, rather than permit them to be lacking in anything."<sup>32</sup>

If a sister of the Company be sick or reduced to painful privation of any sort, although she lives in her own home, the Foundress directs that those in charge of her must see to it, and that several

<sup>29</sup> *Testament*, 2nd Bequest, Salvatori, p. 200.

<sup>30</sup> 4th Bequest, Salvatori, p. 201.

<sup>31</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XIV.

<sup>32</sup> 4th *Counsel*, Salvatori, p. 210.





ANCIENT PAINTING OF ANGELA WITH HER LADIES



capable sisters must be stationed near the invalid, to look after her. At the sick person's death the Company will attend to the funeral.<sup>33</sup>

“Pero, avisovi siate qui prudente et siate buone et vere madre, et quella intrata, che havereti, dispensatila in bene et aumento di essa Compagnia, secondo che la discrezione et amore materno vi dettera.”<sup>34</sup>

“I recommend you to be good, true, prudent mothers of your family and to employ these resources for the benefit and development of the Company according to the dictates of discretion and motherly love.”

“If you love these little daughters of ours sincerely (et sviscerata caritade), it will be impossible for you not to have every one of them particularly imprinted in your memory and in your minds.”<sup>35</sup>

In another place she reminds them: “One of the principal marks of Divine Providence was the choice of you as devoted and loving mothers of this noble family, that you might extend to it the same jealous care as if they were really your children according to nature.”<sup>36</sup>

And in still another passage she says: “If worldly mothers devote so much attention to adorning their daughters, to make them pleasing to their lovers, measuring their efforts to the rank and taste of the suitor, deeming themselves happy to have children who are admired, and loved, by how much greater reason should you so act towards your spiritual daughters. What a happiness, what an admirable distinction to be guides and mothers to the spouses of the King of Kings, to be in a sense, brought into a family bond with the Son of God. Happy, thrice happy, you, if you know how to appreciate your sublime vocation!”<sup>37</sup> Once more on another page she warns, “Be mothers to them, taking care not to slight them.”

<sup>33</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XVIII.

<sup>34</sup> *Testament*, 9th Bequest, Sal., p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> *Testament*, 2nd Bequest, Sal., p. 209.

<sup>36</sup> *Testament*, Introd., Sal., p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> *Testament*, 4th Bequest, Sal., p. 199.

## VII

She believed that the most important need of a girl's heart was expansion: that in adolescence a girl needs to have the nobler impulses encouraged and developed: and thus, in examining the *Counsels* we find she has proceeded to meet the timidity, the fears, the thousand sensitive weaknesses of nature, more or less resultant of the physical being, and the social restrictions of the age in which she lived.

The teachers should be ready for disquietude:

"Let them not doubt," writes the saint, "that although they may have great tribulations and anxieties, all will pass quickly away."<sup>38</sup>

On another page she had promised

"They will never be abandoned in their necessities, and God will provide for them, . . . even miraculously."<sup>39</sup>

She added with inspiration

"Enlarge upon these promises, especially with those whom you see dispirited, irresolute, faint-hearted."<sup>40</sup>

Similarly did she provide for their legitimate craving for sympathy:

"Comfort them, animate them to keep up their good dispositions, and tell them the good tidings which I announce . . . On feast days, visit your daughters, see how they are getting along. Inspire them to stand fast."<sup>41</sup>

How well she realized the inconstancy of a growing girl!

"Persevere, have a care, I tell you, lest you grow cold! "

Repeatedly did she try to sustain them against the natural feminine shrinking from responsibility, one of the most patent of weaknesses:

<sup>38</sup> *Testament*, 5th Bequest, Sal., p. 211.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Sal., p. 212.

<sup>40</sup> *5th Counsel*, Sal., p. 212; "specialmente a quelle, che vedereti sconsolate dubie, e pusillanime."

<sup>41</sup> *5th Counsel*, Sal., p. 210.



"The strength and true comfort of the Holy Spirit be in all of you," she prays, "that you may be sustained, and manfully carry out your duty."<sup>42</sup>

Once more she said

"Be not discouraged, even when you find yourselves devoid of the qualities necessary for your employment. He who called you to it cannot abandon you, but in your moments of need, will stretch out a succoring hand."<sup>43</sup>

It is not here to a false self-confidence she appealed, but to a supreme trust in Divine Providence. Another weakness she noted, and with the utmost delicacy of a practised hand and an experienced eye she showed how to teach the young girl to rise above her unworthy emotions, self-love, vanity, jealousy, and the like.

"It may happen, that a person cannot overcome her feelings in a trifling thing, yet when once she succeeds in this, she may not find anything else too hard."<sup>44</sup>

She guarded the officers against vanity by high motives: "O how much you ought to thank Him that inasmuch as He has deigned to make you presidents over such a noble flock, He will likewise give you knowledge and power. . . . It is assuredly a great grace, and an inestimable good fortune, if you only knew it."<sup>45</sup> . . . Try with God's help to implant in yourself this good thought that you ought not consider yourselves worthy to be the Superiors and Colonels but bear yourselves like ministers and servants . . . considering that God could easily have provided in other ways persons better than you are."<sup>46</sup>

The natural mother's responsibility being delegated to a certain extent, the grave charge of guarding the innocence of these young girls fell to the mothers of the Company, who were not to forget the delicacy and weakness of their young charges.

<sup>42</sup> "Esequire virilmente," *Testament*, Introd., Sal., p. 206.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Sal., p. 207.

<sup>44</sup> *Testament*, 6th Bequest, Sal., p. 203.

<sup>45</sup> *Counsels*, Introd., Sal., p. 207.

<sup>46</sup> *Counsels*, 2nd, Sal., pp. 207, 208.

"Watch over them," she says in one of her numerous warnings, "Watch over them, especially in their scrupulous observance of chastity, that in all things they may act with prudence and decorum!"<sup>47</sup>

Which admonition was reinforced by careful legislation in her *Rule*.

## VIII

During her long meditations over the Scriptures, she seemed to have absorbed completely the sentiment of such lines as "I run in Thy commandments while Thou dost *dilate* my heart!" for "If you meet with a timid soul," she directed "a soul prone to distrust, raise it up, expand it."<sup>48</sup> Her strong practical sense showed in the way she realized the special application of this idea to youth; she seemed to have thought out the definite ways in which a young girl's heart can be so dilated as to lead her to a delight in fulfilling the law of God.

The nobler emotions she proposed to bring into action by various expedients, such as mutual support derived from the Company Reunion, where one joyous young girl found herself shoulder to shoulder with a comrade of kindred spirit; or she appealed to the natural elation of the heart in honors,<sup>49</sup> or perhaps to the perception and recognition of their own growing moral strength,<sup>50</sup> or again to pride and confidence in illustrious superiors, with which she was from the first careful to provide the Company; superiors "who would reveal to the young members, the heart of a mother, full of love!"<sup>51</sup> Finally, with unerring psychology, she made appeal to woman's natural aptitude for the principles of religion, which enlarge and sustain the heart. For "there should be joy in the heart," she declared, "charity, faith, and hope in God. . . ."<sup>52</sup> Live ever by vivid hope. How many of the rich, queens, ladies of rank, in the midst of affluence and grandeur, fail to find repose, because of their extreme

<sup>47</sup> *Testament*, 4th Bequest, Sal., p. 201.

<sup>48</sup> *2nd Counsel*, Sal., p. 209.

<sup>49</sup> *Counsels*, Introd., Sal., p. 207.

<sup>50</sup> *Testament*, 5th and 6th Bequests, Sal., p. 202.

<sup>51</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XIV.

<sup>52</sup> "Quanto le hanno da giubilare, et far festa!"

spiritual poverty, while the poor to whom they give aid, abound in consolation and courage."

Here she opened to them the view of what might be called the established goods of the supernatural life: "I announce to them how they ought to rejoice (*et far festa*), because in Heaven for each one of them is prepared a new glory and joy, provided they stand firm."<sup>53</sup>

In her rule for retirement and modesty the Foundress had admonished her children whom to shun; so now, realizing the need of young people for society, she wisely provided occupants for the vacant thrones in their hearts.

"Let them choose such as lead a life somewhat like their own, whose companionship will give them spiritual profit."<sup>54</sup>

So with all the retrenchments required, she was far from expecting a human heart to go empty. She realized in how far the spiritual maternity of their work could and undoubtedly would supply the happiness they craved.

## IX

She was quick to see the importance of imitation in her scheme of things. She bade her teachers be careful to do first themselves whatever they proposed to exact from their daughters.

"How can you correct them for a fault which they see in you?"<sup>55</sup> she asked, and then went on to warn the Mistresses against giving bad example in talking of useless worldly matters, especially if they yielded to faults of detraction, or suffered such in their presence.<sup>56</sup>

She did not approve of severity.

"I ask you kindly that you will try to draw all with love and with a gentle hand and sweet, and not imperiously, nor with harshness. Consider Jesus Christ who says, "Learn of Me for I am meek and humble of heart."<sup>57</sup> "Teach them not to be harsh nor rude in their speech, but kind and inclined to good will and charity."<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *5th Counsel*, Sal., p. 211.

<sup>54</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XIX.

<sup>55</sup> *6th Counsel*, Sal., p. 212.

<sup>56</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XIX.

<sup>57</sup> *Testament*, 3d Bequest, Sal., p. 201.

<sup>58</sup> *5th Counsel*, Sal., p. 211.

Perhaps there is scarcely a trait so noticeable in her writings as, indeed, in all her recorded actions as is the mild quality of her firmness. She was a willow, not an oak. So we find that she bade her daughters inflict correction with utmost lenity. At serious crises in the Company of St. Ursula, to the Mother General and the General Assembly alone she gave power to expel a member either from the Chapter or from the Company. If there were any trouble with any of the sisters the Neighborhood Assembly was to deliberate upon it first and report to higher authorities, but all action was to follow upon the maturest deliberation.<sup>59</sup> If a penalty were to be imposed at a public meeting, as occasion might demand, the acceptance of it at once was to exonerate the offender in the eyes of the Company. "Fulfil your office correcting with love and kindness, when you discover them in any error from any human frailty."<sup>60</sup>

## X

Yet with all this leniency, this consideration, this slowness of procedure, she had in mind the velvet scabbard, the sword of steel. To counterbalance the elation, the expansion of heart, lest it result in mere ebulliency, there must needs be, in the thought of Angela Merici, the nicety of poise which is obtained only by careful self-restraint and control of the human will. Elation might lead to softness, which was not at all the desired end. And so she provided in her *Rule*, that the unworthy emotions were to be curbed by withdrawal from the false excitements of worldly pleasures . . . by innumerable self-restraints, and by real asceticism. In Chapters four and five of her *Rule* she ordained fasting as the road to that "true spiritual fast" by which all vices and errors of the mind are eliminated. However, very distinctly did she say that no one was to observe the fasts of *Rule* without individual guidance from Superior or confessor. The discipline of the will derived from fidelity to *Rule* was the counterbalance to any undue mildness in any quarter.

The emphasis laid by the Foundress upon observance of *Rule* was unmistakable. First, she said, all the young members must know the *Rule* or plan of life, and although they knew it they must hear it

<sup>59</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XXIII.

<sup>60</sup> *8th Counsel*, Sal., p. 214.



often, hence once a month it was to be read publicly in the Oratory, "in a loud voice."<sup>61</sup> Then each Mistress was to explain the essential points personally to each of the members residing in her neighborhood, either at their house or at her own,<sup>62</sup> and the Mistress was moreover bidden to visit her daughters and even to go often unannounced.<sup>63</sup> Thus does the ounce of prevention obviate the pound of cure, for the Neighborhood Assemblies existed primarily in order to reassure the local authorities that the *Rule* was being carried out. Throughout her Counsels the Foundress again and again urged fidelity to *Rule*:

"When you visit your sisters, counsel them to be solidly united in the observance of *Rule*. . . . For each one of your sisters there is prepared glory and happiness on condition that they remain firm in their resolution and faithful to their *Rule*. Let them entertain no doubt about this, notwithstanding the weariness that will come to them."<sup>64</sup>

To the Lady Governors she declared

"One of your greatest concerns must be that good order and the principles of the institute be faithfully maintained in all things."<sup>65</sup>

Thus, there is no mistaking the positive side of her training, whether to old or young. Emphasis was to be laid upon the will.

She was thoroughly familiar with the fact that the Christian Humanists around her, all of them, stood for the training of the child's moral as well as intellectual nature. She was aware that she did not stand alone. Everybody knew, for instance, that Gabriel Concorreggio, who used to teach school in a house on the Piazza Grande,<sup>66</sup> a stone's throw from where her Oratory now stood, had prevailed upon the municipal government to wipe out an objectionable public resort in the vicinity, — a victory in favor of the moral standards of his pupils. His successors were now teaching Grammar

<sup>61</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XIX.

<sup>62</sup> *Rule*, *Idem*.

<sup>63</sup> *Rule*, Sal., p. 183.

<sup>64</sup> *5th Counsel*, Sal., p. 211.

<sup>65</sup> *Testament*, 11th Bequest, Sal., p. 205.

<sup>66</sup> Zanelli, *G. da Concorreggio e del Commune di Brescia*, *op. cit.*

and Rhetoric, and reading the Classic poets to boys and girls, while Veronica Gambara and Laura Ceretae had by their influence set all the fashionable blue-stockings to inditing epistles in classic Latin.

But the trouble was that the women were forgetting Christian principle, their faith was growing merely traditional, and Angela felt that the keen intellect of the young, glowing with the fresh impetus of the time, must be made to grasp the reasons for faith and moral conviction. Hence, to her mind, it was of first importance that the teachers of girls proceed upon definite, assured principles. Religion, and the personal uplifting influence of the adult upon the adoleseing child, was the crying need which made its appeal to Angela Merici.<sup>67</sup>

## XI

In certain respects, Angela's conception of teaching was in harmony with some modern pedagogical movements, those which did not begin and end in the individual, those which considered the two-fold nature of the organism of society, the individual, and the race. With the Humanistic Realists, the Social Realists, the Disciplinists, the Naturalists, and the Scientific Educationalists she differed regarding the aim to be held in view. As long as their conception of the ultimate aim of education was limited to the possession of the established goods of this present life, she could not but disagree. As long as the horizon was thus circumscribed, she would see no logical reason in attaining what the Naturalists and Scientists would call "larger life," nor what the Humanistic Realists might term "mastery of environment," nor even the renovation of society. If society with its environment lasts but a brief span of time, such an end would seem but hard-bought, the game not worth the candle.

Of the psychological experimenters Angela would probably have asked: "Yes, the unfolding of all human capacities in the individual, the extending of popular education to all the people, this interests me: but to what end did you say?" To the Sociologists she might have replied "Social betterment? and to what goal directed ultimately?" The point of departure in her opinions was the recognition of a twofold nature in the child, the physical and the

<sup>67</sup> Willmann-Kirsch, *Science of Education*, *op. cit.*

spiritual, the animal life of its physique supplemented by the life of grace in its spirit. To her the will was the all-important element, not that conception of will which the Naturalists held, in which the will is a sum of impulsive and emotional tendencies. Her object was to give to the adolescent child all the established goods, not only of its natural but also of its supernatural life. To her, society existed for the individual and not the individual for society. Society was to the child at once a goods of its natural life, to enjoy and enrich itself therewith, and at the same time, and more important still, a means to the attainment of its established goods of the supernatural life, a means to an end not to be obtained within the span of the natural life.

The difference of her aim and view-point being understood, it is astonishing how many ideas voiced by the various schools of pedagogical thought, and which these prided themselves upon originating, or at least upon formulating, occurred long before in her brief and unassuming *Counsels* to her ladies about the training of their young teachers.

The religious view of education might be said to have always supported the Disciplinary conception: however, Angela in her scheme agreed specifically with the modern Disciplinary conception, by laying stress upon the manner in which the teaching should be done.<sup>68</sup> For she indicates:

1. How and in what spirit the teachers are to behave (*1st Counsel, 2nd Counsel*).

2. How they are to employ the principle of Imitation (*8th Counsel*).

3. How they are to foster the young (*4th Counsel, Rule*).

4. How the teachers are to guard the faith of the young (*7th Counsel*).

5. How restrain and encourage them.

6. How they are to train them:

"Visit your daughters . . . and bestow upon them marks of your friendship . . . inquiring into their condition, encouraging them. . . . Teach them that in their own homes they should act intelligently, with prudence and modesty. Let them be polite and always

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Monroe, *History of Education*, p. 256.

well controlled. Eat and drink not for pleasure, nor to satisfy the appetite, but for sustenance, to serve God better; be moderate also in sleeping, sleeping only as much as necessary. . . . Similarly, in laughter let them be controlled and moderate. . . . Do not permit them to listen to anything that is not modest, lawful, needful; in their talk, see that their words are discreet and proper, not harsh nor rude, but kind . . . giving good example everywhere . . . and making for peace and concord wherever they go. . . ."<sup>69</sup>

With the Disciplinarians likewise, she accentuated education rather than instruction. In fact, though she might have formulated a system of instruction to bequeath to the Company of St. Ursula, she preferred to leave that entirely to their own initiative. She certainly believed in the disciplinary use of reason, for she suggested a reason for everything she called upon them to do; for example:

"Eat, to do the will of God better!"<sup>70</sup>

"In worldly intercourse let them not grow too familiar with young men, nor with older men either, howsoever spiritual, because excessive spiritual intimacy with men nearly always changes into carnal familiarity."<sup>71</sup>

"God has so disposed from all eternity, that those who for love of Him unite to do good, meet with prosperity, and all things lend themselves to their aid. See then how important it is to maintain union and concord."<sup>72</sup>

Once more, with the Disciplinarians, such as Locke and Montaigne, she advocated the discipline of natural tendencies as basis for virtue, wisdom and breeding, but while they find that in this life virtue is its own reward,<sup>73</sup> Angela went a step further and found also a reward in the future life.

## XII

Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Froebel held that the child-nature is the proper material for education; the child with its interests, emotions, experiences, intercourse, all are to be brought into play, and moreover by the Naturalistic method, namely self-activity.

<sup>69</sup> *5th Counsel*, Sal., p. 211.

<sup>70</sup> *5th Counsel*.

<sup>71</sup> *7th Counsel*, Sal., p. 213.

<sup>72</sup> *9th Counsel*, Sal., p. 215.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 266.



Angela held this very theory, three hundred years before: this is very clear. In the first place, though she was not dealing with little ones, but with adolescents, strictly speaking with children of a larger growth, she directed her teachers to discover and to act carefully upon the interests of those they were teaching: "Inquire into their conditions," she bade: and again, "not merely their names, but their actual condition, their dispositions, in fact their whole being."

Then the emotions of the pupil were to be brought into play with what skill the following passage may illustrate:

"When you have with kindness counselled and warned some one of a notable error three or four times, and you see that she is not going to obey, then leave her alone, and do not send any one to her, none of the Colonels nor any other of the guardians; on purpose, so that perhaps the miscreant, seeing herself abandoned and dismissed, may be moved to compunction and may long to remain and persevere in the Company. When she comes back to you of her own accord, ill content with her folly, you should receive her, on condition, however, that she beg pardon."<sup>74</sup>

Again she used the Naturalistic appeal to experience, when she showed how her daughters were to teach the spirit and object of alms-giving. Analogously, she said that alms in a way compels to right living, and that hence it is good to bestow it, for you thus withdraw the person from evil and vice, and lead him to good:

"just like a young girl who accepts a present from somebody, some stranger, becomes under obligations to please him, so that she cannot well refuse to do his wishes."<sup>75</sup>

So the recipient of your alms can no longer refuse you.

Angela constantly stressed her point by appeal to experience. Her ideas here were, at the root, similar to those of the Naturalists, with this difference, however, that with Angela, "instruction was intended to reach the will and the character to form an abiding actuality, a preference," to use the Pestalozzian expression, "for that which constitutes inner freedom," not only in the natural, but still more, in the supernatural, the immortal life; to the Naturalists, will consisted

<sup>74</sup> *Testament*, 5th Bequest, Sal., p. 202.

<sup>75</sup> *Testament*, 9th Bequest, Sal., p. 204.

in "an attitude of preference for that which constitutes inner freedom": to Angela, on the other hand, will was not a vague attitude of vaguer tendencies in the human make-up, but a definite and responsible power of the human soul.

She would have found much in common with the Psychological School of Pedagogy. Like them her dominant thought was to train the teacher. She considered her *Counsels* to them of such importance, that in order to emphasize this, she called her young mistresses around her dying bed, and had her manuscript read aloud to them.

"Strive to put into practice these few principles which I leave you to carry out after my death,"

she wrote: and again,

"I am leaving you in my place, and as my heirs, you are to have this legacy (these mementoes), which as my last will I give you to carry out faithfully. . . ." <sup>76</sup>

Long antecedent to the Psychologists in their age, she in hers, saw the necessity of changing the spirit of teaching: "Old ways, new life!" this was her watchword. And above all, Angela Merici could well have claimed as the very pearl of her own casket their cardinal point, the vaunted discovery of their epoch, namely, *sympathy with the child*.

"And when you visit them," she wrote quaintly, "I want you to be sure to greet them for me too, and touch their hands for me, and tell them. . . ." One thinks of Bayard's pretty farewell to the maids of Brescia in the old chronicle: "Then he touched them all upon the hands after the Italian manner, and they fell upon their knees weeping. . . ." <sup>77</sup>

In fact, sympathy with the young breathes marvellously all through Angela's writings: the richest legacy she bequeathed to her teachers was the mother heart, which, after four centuries, throbs still in the teaching nuns of the Ursuline order. <sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Sal., p. 200.

<sup>77</sup> Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, *op. cit.*

<sup>78</sup> . . . "salutarle, e toccargle la mano ancor da mia parte. . . ." Angela, *5th Counsel*, Sal., p. 211.

"I am more alive than ever I was in this life, and I shall see you better and hold dearer the good deeds which I constantly behold you doing and I will and can help you more . . ." these were her dying words.<sup>79</sup> However, her point of departure from these very psychologists, and a radical one, would have been this:

"The teacher only a care-taker? Perish the thought! The teacher's office must be to foster, to direct, to instruct! "

To Angela's mind, the teacher was not to stand by and watch the little human machine: she was to prepare the child for life, body and soul: to open up the springs of being and so nurture reason and will, that such habits develop as will carry this young life safe through dangerous currents.

The results of the care-taker idea are only too apparent, according to a recent writer: <sup>80</sup> The child has asserted its "self"; authority is overruled; external control is over-ridden; discipline has come to mean "laissez faire", "noli me tangere": he chooses his play, his school, his studies, his comrades. "The mistake has been emphatically acknowledged."<sup>81</sup>

With the Scientific tendency in pedagogy, with Herbert Spencer, Huxley, and the rest, Angela would have found little or nothing in common because their basis was materialism, and their methods were unknown in her age.

She would indeed have sympathized with the modern Sociologist's aspirations for social betterment, since it was for this very end that she had established her Company of workers. It is a mistaken conception that the Church seeks to control the child for the sake of its own organization and for his own eternal salvation alone; it cannot be too often repeated that Christ's Church exists for the soul and not the soul for it, and that the inheritance which the Church sets before the child consists in the right estimate of the goods of this world, and the right value of the goods of eternity as revealed by faith. Angela's instructions to her ladies certainly point to the forming of definite social habits, and indirectly to a patriotic spirit, but she would have substituted for the altruism of the modern Socialist

<sup>79</sup> *Introd., Counsels, Sal.*, p. 206.

<sup>80</sup> Harbrecht, *Fundamental Educational Notions*, p. 65.

<sup>81</sup> Dewey, *Cyclopedia of Education*, Vol. 5, p. 318.

the principle of Christian brotherhood. In her gatherings, the lady of title sat side by side on the bench with the maid who waited upon her ladyship, and she insisted that her teachers study the activities and needs of the social structure, and adapt their organization to these in the course of time.

"These being done, as well as other similar things which the Holy Ghost will prompt you to do according to times and circumstances, rejoice." "If according to the times you happen to make any new ordinances, or do anything any other way, do it prudently, and after good counsel."<sup>82</sup>

It was to this same end that she set down that unique injunction which will be considered further on: — Change your *Rule* to suit the times.

### XIII

It is surprising, interesting, and even amusing, to see the utterances of many of these famous pedagogical writers and experimenters foreshadowed often in the *Counsels* and the working plan of this obscure woman, their predecessor, shall we say, precursor?

Wolfgang Ratke (1571–1635), from artificial comparisons with nature deduced the principle, "Since nature uses a particular method . . . regard must be had to it in teaching: for all unnatural and violent or forcible teaching and learning is harmful."<sup>83</sup> Angela Merici thirty-five years before had written:

"Be careful not to try to accomplish anything by force, for God has given free will to each one, and will not force anybody, but simply shows them, invites them, and counsels: also, through the mouth of St. John: 'I counsel thee to buy a crown imperishable: ' 'I counsel thee,' He says, not 'I force thee.' . . ."<sup>84</sup>

When Commenius (1592–1670) wrote in his *Didactic Magna*, 1632, "the ultimate end of man is beyond this life": and "life is but a preparation for eternity," he was but voicing Angela's ideas, borrowed from the Church, that the established goods of this life are

<sup>82</sup> *Testament*, 11th Bequest, Sal., p. 205.

<sup>83</sup> Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>84</sup> *Testament*, 3d Bequest, Sal., p. 221.



intended to prepare the child for those of a future life, that spiritual, and even more rich inheritance. Commenius held the same view as she did when he said a man can most easily be formed in early youth and cannot be formed properly except at this age. For this very reason Angela undertook her institute. And John Locke (1632-1704), whose philosophical principles do not always accord with his views on education,<sup>85</sup> presents, singularly enough, a passage strikingly like one of Angela's own:

*John Locke*

"The great principle and foundation of all virtue and worth is placed in this: that a man is able to deny himself his own desires . . . and follow what reason directs as best, though the appetite lean the other way. . . . The first thing children should learn to know should be that they are not to have anything because it pleases them, but because it was thought fit for them."<sup>86</sup>

*Angela Merici*

"Teach them to eat and drink not to satisfy the appetite, nor for pleasure, but because it is necessary to sustain nature, in order to serve God." *5th Counsel*, Sal. 211.

Pestalozzi and Angela were of one mind in that famous axiom, hers in the sixteenth, his in the nineteenth century, that the school so ardently desired, the school to meet the needs of the day, was the transformed home.<sup>87</sup>

Herbart, born thirty years later still, formulated another of her principles when he wrote:

"The educative instruction that reaches and forms the will or determines volitions and thus shapes character, is the proper work of the school."<sup>88</sup>

If Angela's prescriptions on this point could be summarized they would amount to this:

"Your most important task is to strengthen the will of those

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>86</sup> *Idem.*, p. 263.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Leonard and Gertrude*, in Monroe, p. 317.

<sup>88</sup> Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

under your charge, . . .”<sup>89</sup> “especially when you see them disconsolate, hesitating, afraid.” She urges the teachers to purify and enoble their intentions and their motives of acting; and she rests all promise of success upon their being strongly united, as a teaching-body with one will.

And finally, Angela’s whole system in dealing with the young exhibits what Froebel expressed when he said:

“The child learns, not by studying justice and responsibility in casual relations, but by living them out.”<sup>90</sup>

And so, returning to the shadowy old painting wherein, a little worn, a little emaciated, but benignant ever, she sits teaching the ladies of Brescia, one grasps more fully in the light of her written word, the artist’s exact conception of this woman who with native unlettered genius, and a supernatural inspiration, formulated a movement all too little known in the pages of history. She is a true teacher of teachers.

<sup>89</sup> Sal., p. 211.

<sup>90</sup> Monroe, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

## CHAPTER NINE

### THE IDEA ACHIEVED

#### I

THE twenty-seventh of January, one thousand, five hundred forty, there died Sister Angela Merici, of Desenzano in the province of Brescia, aged between sixty-five and seventy years. She was a thin, spare woman of medium height, wearing a dark habit. Her body was carried on the twenty-eighth of January at the sixth hour, to the church of St. Afra, and I saw this ceremony with my brother, James Nassino."

These lines transcribed from a private journal of Pondolfo Nassino, gentleman of Brescia, seem a fitting record of a person who lived simply and died simply. Whatever uncertainty may exist about other dates of her life and facts of her experience, there can be little doubt concerning the date of her death, thus emphatically recorded, and borne witness to, likewise, by several other interesting proofs. The second evidence is a note written in the dialect of that day on the fly leaf of an Office book, the Office of the Blessed Virgin, which the Saint used in her lifetime:

"On the twenty-seventh day of January, fifteen forty, at the twenty-first hour and a half on a Tuesday, died the Madre, Sister Angela: and this is her Office book from which she used to recite her Office."

*"A di 27 Cener 1540 a hori 21  
e mezza, in di de martidi manchete  
la Matre Sur Angiela: e questo era  
lo suo hofcio, chè lei diseva."*

The third proof of the date is found in the earliest manuscript book of the Company which registers the signatures of the institute: and also in the first Mortuary Record of the Company is inscribed:

*"La Madre Svore Angela morite a  
di 27 Zenaro del 40."*

Besides these sufficiently eloquent voices, there is an old picture of Angela, which Lombardi had rescued from destruction by means of an excellent brush of his own day, and on it an inscription reads:

*Effigies B. A. de Mericies Brixen  
Fundatricis Societatis S. Ursulae.  
Obiit anno 1540, 27th Januarii."*

In face of all these facts, it is astonishing that some biographers have had Angela dying in March, in June, in October, and even as late as November, 1540!

On a morning in January it was, then, that we picture Margherita dell'Olma, Dominica Dolci, and the others, hurrying through the street while the busy Brescian wives exclaimed:

"There they go, those little Ursulines! God be praised, they are going down to weep at the bier. When they smell the sweet fragrance they will dry their eyes!"

The whole town was alert that day. And an impressive scene it was at St. Afra's, whither hastened the daughters of Angela Merici, now numbering about a hundred and fifty. There, in her narrow apartment, a stone's throw from the church, the night before had the Blessed Mother breathed her last.

One of the easy sayings applied by biographers of the old school to the saints was, that they were universally beloved. If the subject of eulogy was of the fair sex, she was often found to be fair, wise, virtuous, and naturally, beloved, universally beloved. The mediaeval limner, dazzled by the nimbus which time has fashioned around the head of the favorite, forgets that Christ Himself could count upon but twelve. "If they hate me, they will hate you," He warned. Angela's aureola, happily, perhaps, has dimmed for us the remembrance of the hook-nosed Pharisee who beset her elbow while alive, howsoever clear it is to posterity, that he quickly laid the rending hand upon her work after death. Never was saint who had, during life, more popular titles on the common tongue than had she:

"*Angela in carne*" ..... "Angel in the flesh"  
 "*Donna senza carne*" ..... "Woman without a body"  
 "*Anima santa*" ..... "Living saint"



- "Vergine di Cristo"* ..... "Virgin of Christ"  
*"Piena di Spirito Santo"* .... "Full of the Holy Spirit"  
*"Angela di Paradiso"* ..... "Angel of Paradise"  
*"Oracolo di Dio"* ..... "Oracle of God"<sup>1</sup>

Such were the phrases which the enthusiastic admirers among the Brescians fashioned for her. Recalling the bitter prayer that stands over against her name, it is probable that she herself was not accustomed to take these pretty jingles for anything more than affectionate pleasantries.

## II

And is it true that she died of love, this intrepid Renaissance woman, who did not fear to ride horse-back over swollen torrents? this girl of the mystic ladder? this child, that once dreamed in the twilight of an Italian garden? this little one, who used to sit on the knee of John Merici beside the hearth in the old house at Desenzano? How did she die?

In the spring of 1539, they tell, that she fell ill with a languor which dragged on through the summer months. The doctor did not seem apprehensive, but she herself told her friends that her end was approaching, and that this was to be her last illness; indeed, according to the best credited traditions, she told them she would die at half past nine on the twenty-seventh of January.<sup>2</sup> Doctor Gardoni, a physician of much repute, visited her often, and she begged him to tell her candidly if he did not consider her to be near the point of death. He did not pronounce the desired verdict. Nevertheless, weakness kept her confined to bed the greater part of the time, and there, frail and attenuated, she held long spiritual levees, as much a cynosure in Brescia, in her way, as were the satin-coveleted dames of Louis Quinze.

In the course of that sickness, writes Girelli, visitors came constantly to see her, from the ranks of her sisters and from the circles of the most respectable persons of the city, all eager for some word of comfort from her lips or some spiritual remembrance of her.<sup>3</sup> Among these were James Chizzola and Thomas Gavardi, who after

<sup>1</sup> Salvatori, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Salvatori, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> Girelli, § 43.

many years gave depositions about it, at the request of the Brescian municipality. They testified that, upon their arrival, she forced herself into an erect posture in bed and expressed herself in a long and well-ordered speech, urging them to live earnest Christian lives. Finally, when her strength gave out and her voice failed, she summed up all in this one sentence from the *Imitation of Christ*:

“Do in life as you would wish to have done when you are at the point of death.”

This utterance of hers spread from mouth to mouth in the city, not as something new, but as the last warning of Madre Angela, who was held in such esteem. Fifty years later, allusion was made to these words in the verses composed for the new tomb, which was at the time being erected:

*“Nostram qui vitam nostis, sic vivite:  
sic mors, non mors, sed vita perennis  
erit.”*

The Countess Lodrone and the other officers of the Company visited their Mother General on alternate days, while the faithful Barbara and Girolama Buschi ministered to her and nursed her as they could, and the busy members of the Company went on with their daily tasks. Her illness, a burning fever, seemed to show nothing beyond a slow languor and weakness.

### III

One morning she asked that all the officers of the Company be assembled. She wished, she said, to have her secretary present, Gabriel Cozzano. So they gathered around their dying mother, and waited in silence. Propped up against her pillow, she spoke, recalling to them the spirit of their Institute; she repeated, once more, what she conceived to be the will of God for the Company of Saint Ursula, warning them again of the difficulties that lay in their path. Then she represented to them that she must now give her entire attention to the affairs of her own soul, and that for this reason she thought it expedient for them to have some one in her place to

govern the Company. She desired the Countess Lodrone, who was at present the Mother Assistant, to take upon herself this charge, until the regular election should have taken place according to *Rule*, after God had called her to himself. She said that she wished the Countess to succeed her; she chose her as the one best qualified to continue the government of the Company, and at this moment she begged of them all to promise that they would accept her and obey her. She appointed Caterina Meja to assist the Countess.

All the ladies, deeply impressed and full of grief from their impending bereavement, promised loyalty to the Countess Lodrone. Then Angela gave the Countess the copy of her last Will and Testament which had been drawn up by Cozzano, and she instructed the new mother that this document was to be delivered to her daughters in formal assembly after her funeral. The agitation and sorrow of all the Company can well be imagined; all Brescia seemed concerned in the general sense of loss.

As the twenty-seventh of January approached, she wished all her daughters called to her bedside once more, that she might give them all a last word of affectionate leave. There they thronged, more than a hundred, crowding into the small apartment with scarcely breathing space, pushing aside the wooden benches of the outer room, some kneeling on the steps outside, listening with strained ears to the voice whose accents they knew and loved so well. Then the dying woman, short of breath, made sign to Gabriel Cozzano to read aloud her *Counsels*, while she lay as they had placed her, gazing with glistening, kindly eyes, out through the doorway at the kneeling throng.

“Suor Angela,” began Cozzano, with what composure he could summon, “Angela, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ, to her dear daughters and sisters of the Company of Saint Ursula:

“May the strength and comfort of the Holy Spirit be in you all, so that you may be able to hold out, and to carry on manfully (virilmente) and faithfully, the enterprise I have entrusted to you; and that you may look forward to the great reward which God has prepared for you. . . .”

"Stand upon your guard like vigilant shepherds and good ministers: for I have prayed God so often to enlighten and direct you, and to teach those who had this work to do for His love. . . ."

"Remember that you must appreciate your children, because the more you appreciate them, the more you will love them, and the more you love them, the better you will watch over and take care of them; this is impossible, unless night and day you have them engraven one by one, all of them, in your own heart, since that is the way of love.<sup>4</sup> Be submissive to the principal mothers of the Company whom I leave you in my stead, for that is right: and whatever you do, do it in obedience to them, and not as if doing your own way. For in obeying me, you obey Jesus Christ, who in His immense goodness has chosen me, living and dead, to be the mother of this noble Company . . . and has given me grace to govern it according to His will."<sup>5</sup>

Listening to these words of sublime assurance, and glancing from the reader to the face of the woman who leaned erect upon her pallet, what did they encounter in her dying eyes?

Gabriel Cozzano went on: "Be sure, if you have time, and it is convenient, and especially on feast days, to go visit your children and your dear sisters; see how they are getting along, comfort them, urge them to be faithful to the life they have taken up, inspire them to desire celestial good things, to long for those joyous feasts in heaven, those happy times and everlasting triumphs; urge them to abandon entirely the love of this world where there is no repose, no content in anything. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

"Remember that you will have to defend and shield your flock from wolves, from worldly people, and from false religious or heretics, for many, under guise of good advice, may weaken the inclination of some of these poor little ones towards good. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

"Cling together with the bonds of charity, sharing with one another, helping one another, supporting each other in Jesus Christ. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

"I assure you, that if you stand united, all of you, in heart, you will

<sup>4</sup> Salvatori, pp. 206-7-9.

<sup>5</sup> Salvatori, p. 209.

<sup>6</sup> Salvatori, p. 210.

<sup>7</sup> Salvatori, p. 213.

<sup>8</sup> Salvatori, p. 214.



be like a strong rock and an impregnable tower against all the adversities, persecutions, and deceits of the evil spirits; and hold it for a certainty that any grace that you may ask of God will infallibly be granted you, and that I shall always be in the midst of you, aiding your prayers. . . .

"Now I am going to leave you. Be consoled, and have great faith and hope. My dearest wish is, that you may be blessed in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen."<sup>9</sup>

As the Secretary's voice died out, the solemnity of the room was like that of a sanctuary, in which the general sadness seemed rebuked by the radiant smile on Angela's face, as, one by one, her daughters lingeringly took their farewell.

#### IV

The Sunday before she died, a relative who had come in from Salò and was attending Mass in the Cathedral, heard the preacher appeal to the congregation for prayers for Suor Angela "who was dying." The young man, in alarm, hurried to her apartments, as has already been related, and found her preparing herself light-heartedly for her own funeral.<sup>10</sup>

She received the last Sacraments, Faino tells us, "with angelic devotion; and afterwards spent a long time in sweet colloquies, pressing to her heart the image of Jesus crucified; seeing around her bed the Assistants and several of the sisters, she told them once more with heavenly eloquence what she had so much at heart, regarding humility, obedience, observance of *Rule*, and preservation of virginity. At last, like the most loving of mothers, she gave them again her parting blessing." These were the last things she said, except to ask for the Tertiary's habit, and to express a wish that she might be laid on the lowly mat which had so long served her for a bed. They carried out her wishes and stretched her on the mat on the floor. The traditions handed down from that scene relate how she went into ecstasy from that moment, her large eyes raised to heaven, oblivious, as she was, to all sensible objects. It was a bare room where she lay, with a chair, a table, a rough bed or couch, a

<sup>9</sup> Salvatori, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> Postel, Vol. I.

crucifix, blank walls, perhaps a print or two of the Blessed Mother, a door-sill worn by many feet, a small window, — such was the setting of the scene. There was no further indication of sight nor of hearing, no sign of life, except occasional sighs mingled with the word “Jesus”, which, as Faino says, broke from her heart, inebriated with love. Upon her low bed, her eyes were fixed immovable upon Heaven, and gradually as the last moment was nearing, her face took on a splendor that bespoke the bliss of a beatified soul. Suddenly, she seemed aroused from her ecstasy. She pronounced in a clear voice the words:

“Into Thy hands O Lord I commend my spirit.”

Then she gave her soul to God.

A very ancient picture kept in the church of the Company of Saint Ursula at Brescia, recalls this remarkable scene.

## V

And when Angela Merici died, the whole city went into mourning. Painter and musician, soldier and shop-keeper, Podesta, and Cardinal-bishop, — but most of all, the beggars and the little girls, — wept. She died at half past nine; the next morning early they carried her body to Saint Afra's church, but a stone's throw away, to satisfy the huge concourse of people who thronged to see her. There were sobs among them, and there was joy, and panegyric gave place to devout invocation. They had but a little way to carry her, but this was done with immense and brilliant solemnity.

The biographers state that she was given a patrician funeral. In those days cemeteries around churches were used to bury the ordinary citizens, while persons of birth and distinction sought a resting place within, and the gorgeous mausoleums of the patricians, in the Italian Churches mark for us today the fleeting honors of the world.<sup>11</sup> By the early sixteenth century, the old dark and gloomy funeral rites had given way to splendid pomp, so that when a great patrician passed away in Brescia, bells were no longer tolled, they were pealed. On the funeral day shops were shut; buildings were draped with trailing curtains of black velvet and gold fringes. The

<sup>11</sup> Molmenti, *op. cit.*, I, 212, 213.

body was carried on a rich bier, by a cortège headed by guildsmen with standards and pennons, the brethren in tunics of red, blue, and white, bearing enormous gilded candles, painted in figures and flowers! then the Capitulars walked, singing psalms, and followed by the rest of the clergy. Behind the bier would come the Podesta, the magistrates, and patricians, and then the crowd of people.<sup>12</sup>

"No marrying nor burying without kith and kin," said a very ancient Brescian proverb.

A touch of the human spirit of that age of contrasts was given by a strange fellow among the crowd at funerals, crouching low and dodging between people's legs, a figure not overlooked by Carpaccio in his record of the time, a strange personage called the Cerone, whose function at funerals is set down in old documents.<sup>13</sup> The creature was so called, because his business and his privilege was to gather avariciously the wax drippings from the candles carried in procession, to store them in a sack hung around his neck. Curious antithesis to the spectacle! Then, the long procession would go out of its way to pass the principal municipal buildings on its road to the church, which would be festooned in black, with perhaps, an orator, there, who would speak from a platform hung with black trappings. Molmenti gives as illustration of a patrician funeral in those days, a reproduction of Carpaccio's painting of St. Ursula borne on her bier, attended by a gorgeous cavalcade of notables. Allowing for a lapse of a quarter century, one could easily conceive the crown of the lovely young Ursula replaced by the coif and dark habit of the emaciated Angela, whose face in death brought out cries of "Santa del Paradiso! prega per noi!" and from this beautiful old painting one could have a fair idea of what the solemn cortège looked like, that early January morning, to such a man as Pandolfo Nassino, citizen of Brescia, who declared that he with his brother James saw it pass.

So they celebrated her obsequies, and laid her remains exposed to view on the bier, in the crypt of Saint Afra, called *Il Luogo de' Sant'*, on account of the many relics of martyrs and saints kept there from time immorial. A fragrance seemed to suffuse her body, persisting

<sup>12</sup> Molmenti, *op. cit.*, pp. 202, 203.

<sup>13</sup> See the funeral of Caterina Cornaro, Venice, 1510. Molmenti, p. 206.

for years: it lasted until 1672, so Faino recorded, and a hundred and thirty-two years after her death it was noted by a writer of the day.<sup>14</sup>

Many saints have emitted agreeable odors during their lifetime or at death. These odors were various; they resembled those of the violet or the rose, orange blossoms, cinnamon, musk.<sup>15</sup> At the death of Saint Teresa, the fragrance arising from her person became so overpowering that the sisters were obliged to open the casement. . . . When the bier was carried out of the convent door the convent gardener exclaimed: —

“God bless me! this saint smells like quinces, lemons and jasmynes.”<sup>16</sup>

The presence of the relics of St. Teresa was traced by means of this fragrance.<sup>17</sup>

Agontino Gallo made affidavit that the whole city was aware that for thirty days Angela's body showed no corruption. All the time that her remains lay exposed to the air, they not only did not emit any bad odor or show other sign of corruption, but remained fresh, flexible, elastic, like a living body, with a sweet fragrance which filled all the place around her.

Eye-witnesses told, how, for three nights after she was laid in the crypt, there appeared over the roof of the church, suspended above the spot where her body was, an unusual splendor, in the form of a large star, which some declared was likewise visible by day. The star was said to have begun to shine on the night of January twenty-eighth in such a way that many people outside the city of Brescia were attracted there.<sup>18</sup>

The testimony of Giacomo Tribesco about the star brings it home to us with a very human touch: “I declare this to be true, . . . at the time of her death I was not there. I was in Cremona at that time.

<sup>14</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Poulain, p. 375, 6th ed., 1910, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*.

<sup>16</sup> *Minor Works of Saint Teresa*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>17</sup> “We can no longer admit that this fragrance is miraculous in itself but only in virtue of the circumstances. In fact, doctors have observed, although rarely, a certain number of maladies in which these same odors are produced, for instance, in a normal state the derivatives of alcohol (aldehydes and acetones) resulting from digestion are oxidized; but in certain troubles of the nervous system and of interior nutrition they escape by the breath.” (See Dr. G. Dumas' article in the *Revue de Paris* of Dec. 1, 1907), Poulain, *Graces of Interior Prayer*, p. 375.

<sup>18</sup> Sworn testimony of Agostino Gallo, in Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, pp. 231, 235.





CARPACCIO'S PAINTING OF ST. URSULA ON HER BIER, IN THE SCUOLA AT VENICE



. . . Our Chapter was being held at Brescia. And they were told by the Fathers of the monastery of St. Afra, at the time of her death, and by gentlemen of the said parish, that her body being above ground for many days in the crypt of the Martyrs, that the first three evenings after her death, over the roof of the church, and over the spot where her body was, was seen a most bright star of great splendor. The same thing was testified in these days, in April, 1591, by a noble gentleman of the name of Signor Constantino, who was a son of Signor Maffeo Bona, saying that his father saw that star over the body of the blessed one, for three days and nights, and a great many people went out to see it, greatly astounded."<sup>19</sup>

## VI

She lay there unburied for thirty days because there arose a dispute as to where her tomb ought to be. She had applied to Rome some years before for permission, as Tertiary, to be buried, not in the Franciscan church, but in Saint Afra's among the Martyrs, and a Brief from Clement VII had confirmed her in this privilege. Whether this Brief happened to be unknown, or whether on account of some other misunderstanding, the cathedral canons claimed her body for their church because the Ursuline Oratory stood in their parish, the Franciscans claimed her as Tertiary, and St. Afra's Canons, as a parishioner. It recalled the famous dispute of the seven cities over Homer dead; at least, it was, in the true sense, like the old fable of Fame and the beggar. Little did the smiling Angela on her bier care for all the world's wrangling, or for all the stars' shining. She was dead. For eternity, her own orbit had just swung into the spaces of God's light.

During those thirty days the painters had their chance, which they never had possessed during her lifetime,<sup>20</sup> among the rest, the two celebrated Brescian artists, Romanino and Moretto, of the first of whom, Faino wrote: "Alessandro Moretto, celebrated painter of the time, pupil of Raffaele d'Urbino, who, with his brush imitated nature so well, that you could not tell the difference between a copy and its original."

<sup>19</sup> Sworn testimony of Iacomo Tribesco Bresciano Cananico in Bertolotti, p. 236.

<sup>20</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 126. Also, see Appendix, Note E, on Pictures.

She lay there more like one asleep than dead, and in this wise, Moretto painted her likeness on the lid of the sarcophagus in which she was finally buried, in St. Afra's. Nazari prefixed later to his biography an engraving of this first and original tomb,<sup>21</sup> which was decorated with sculpture and painting, under direction of P. Gian Francesco Saramondi, who had charge of its construction. Lombardi says its base was in three tiers; below, were two little angels presenting a soul to the Eternal Father.

The casket was placed in the tomb and walled in by the upright panel on which Moretto painted Angela in profile, lying dead; and upon which there were several inscriptions, among them, one by Gabriel Cozzano, and the following by Dr. Zanetti, notable citizen and inveterate rhymer of Brescia:

*"Angela viva fuit, nunc Angela Mortua decor:  
Sum tamen angelicis Angela iuncta choris,  
Vos qui me nostis, exemplo vivite nostro:  
Sic facite ut docue: mortua adhuc doceo."*<sup>22</sup>

## VII

A month having elapsed since the funeral, Countess Lodrone invited all the members of the Company to assemble at the Oratory, in order to carry out the wishes of their deceased Foundress.

No doubt, the Countess, signalized by the choice of such a person as Angela Merici, would be a character worthy of study, but, unfortunately, the records of her many years experience in governing the Company are meagre. She was, certainly, a woman of aristocratic birth and position in Brescia, sprung of a wealthy family, and, advantageously for the new institute, was, at that moment, in touch with prelates and princes of her day. She is depicted by contemporaries as a lady of eminent piety, of distinguished mind, with a manner full of dignity, yet affable, and with gifts exceptional for government.<sup>23</sup>

She opened the first Chapter meeting of the Company, with im-

<sup>21</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 44. Another tomb replaced it in 1580. See p. 229 in *Ste. Angèle M. par une religieuse du même Ordre*, Paris, 1922.

<sup>22</sup> *Ste. A. Merici par une religieuse*, p. 228; Girelli, § 44.

<sup>23</sup> Postel, Vol. I, p. 173.



pressive seriousness. The body of the Chapter renewed their loyal adherence to her as their head; Cardinal Cornaro, Bishop of Brescia, upon this occasion, ratified and confirmed her election as Mother General. The Countess then addressed the assembly, reminding them of the day when, kneeling around Angela's bed, they had listened to the tender words of their Mother's *Counsels*, which were now their own forever, a precious heritage, breathing the spirit of their dead Foundress.

"But, dear sisters and daughters," the Countess went on, "Our Saint has left us another precious document which I have now to lay before you. Here it is; she charged me to communicate it to you after her funeral, and it is for that reason I have called you here to the Oratory today. It is her voice that you are going to hear, once more speaking to her children whom she so loved."

The Countess then turned to Gabriel Cozzano, who began the reading of Angela's last Will and Testament:

"Sister Angela, unworthy servant of Christ, to the Countess Lady Lucrezia, principal Mother of the Company of Saint Ursula, and to the other governors and mothers, the noble matrons:

MADONNA GENEPTA DI LUCIAGI

MADONNA MARIA DI' AVOGADRI

MADONNA VERONICA DI'BUCCI'

MADONNA ORSOLINA DI'GAVARDI

MADONNA GIOVANNA DI'MONTI

MADONNA ISABELLA DA PRATO

MADONNA LIONELLA DI'PEDECIOCCHI

MADONNA CATRINA DI'MEI'

the eternal Benediction of the omnipotent God, be upon all of us, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.<sup>24</sup>

From this solemn and stately invocation which rang out through the stillness of the room, the reader went on to that passage which seemed to rise from the heart of Angela with irrepressible tenderness:

<sup>24</sup> Salvatori, p. 198. The spelling is according to the ancient form given in the earliest edition.

"My own most dear sisters and honored mothers in the Blood of Jesus Christ. . . ." <sup>25</sup>

Here tears sprang to every eye. She went on, pleading with them to govern the Company for the sole love of God, and out of single-minded zeal for the salvation of souls. Next, she prayed them to study their daughters individually and personally. She insisted that she would have them deal gently, and not imperiously or harshly. They must look to their daughters' growth in virtue. Fifth, she told the Company how to treat members when they would not yield to governance. Sixth, she instructed them what they were to consider indications of vocation. Then, she urged them to hold monthly assemblies or conferences upon the Company's affairs. She prescribed spiritual exhortations to be given for the benefit of the sisters all together. Ninth, she counselled them to be prudent in temporal affairs, for the good of the Company. In the Tenth Bequest, she prayed them to shun all discord and trouble and scandal, and urged them to be careful that the seed of heretical opinion be not spread among the members. And finally, she warned them to see that the *Rule* of the Company be diligently observed; finally she concluded:

"Hold it for certain truth, that this rule of conduct was fashioned by God's Holy Hand; nor will He ever abandon the Company as long as the world shall last. Believe it. Do not doubt it. I know what I am saying. Now I am going away; but first, I embrace you, and to each I give the kiss of peace, begging God to bless you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

In grave silence the assembled Company of Saint Ursula sat listening to her words on that never-to-be-forgotten day.

And this, then, was the consummation. They viewed her life as a whole, a completed book. Those especially who had been intimate with her for years, and had known the circumstances of her youth as well as her subsequent history, those who loved and appreciated her, could now see in retrospect the great idea that had actuated her, and the long trend of influences which had shaped it, delayed it, ripened it. It was now their particular privilege to share in its con-

<sup>25</sup> Salvatori, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-203.

summation. Into their hands she had herself formally confided this work of her genius, her divine inspiration, and upon them Rome itself, by canonical sanction, was shortly now to bestow the fiat of the Holy Spirit. Here was a brand-new idea, original, fresh: new, because it was a movement of women alone; new, in its unrestrictedness, since they sought neither the safeguards nor the limitations of monasticism and because they pledged themselves never to marry; and finally, it was new in having for its principal object the moral and religious training of young girls. No such organization had ever before existed.

Its basis indicated that it was Angela's intention to make it eventually world-wide, as she established it, not upon diocesan, but upon Roman authority. Its key-note was expansion. It was thus no mere sodality, no mere confraternity; to consider it one is to misread her.

And her Teaching Idea was the stronger for being fashioned upon such slender threads of organism. The greatest power often exists in slight mechanism; this is the secret at once of elasticity and of economy, and she had the sagacity to make use of it.

The Company of St. Ursula and the *Rule* which Angela gave to it, embodied an idea distinctly in advance of her age, and one whose gradual unfolding, after her death, will be found to be as interesting as has been its development.

There were already serious matters to consider, when her daughters turned back to the life that lay before them. Countess Lodrone at once took up the affair of the Papal Approbation for which Angela had applied, and securing what influence in high places she could, she made it a point to press the issue. Meantime, clouds were gathering in the sky. Angela had foreseen this: it was for this she had urged them to keep united, urged them to go to the feet of Christ Himself with troubles that should arise, urged them to watch vigorously lest the insinuation of outsiders, under guise of good, disrupt their little Company; and hardly was she laid to rest before certain good folk of Brescia, people of very excellent intentions, even learned, came out and openly condemned her institute. Countess Lodrone was at the helm, during this stormy period.

## VIII

Angela died without receiving the consolation of the Pope's Bull. Doubtless the vacancy of the See of Brescia at the time Cozzano drew up her petition must have delayed the business somewhat, and Rome, the eternal, was several years in formulating a reply, so that the angel of its inspiration had folded her wings and soared Heavenwards four years before her little Company could taste the joy of canonical erection. The thirty days quarrel of two Religious Orders for the possession of her dead body had to be settled by Rome in the meantime, so that plenty must have been heard in the Eternal City of Angela's subsequent miracles, dinned into their ears, yet all this disturbed not at all the deliberateness of their proceedings.

But with such nicety has the Holy See always watched over the very heart of her institute, that some secret understanding might almost seem to have existed between her and the Holy Father. During the days of her sojourn in Rome in 1525, when Clement VII himself begged her to remain in his capital and set up her inspired work, an invitation which she was obliged modestly to refuse, what conferences did she not hold with the Holy Father concerning this work of hers which was destined to last to the end of time? How was it, that for an organization designated as a mere confraternity, she applied to Rome so confidently, asking for her Company of St. Ursula that protection heretofore accorded only to the monastic Orders? Why indeed, were it not that she had already made her plans familiar at Rome, and felt sure of her ground?

In this document from Rome three very notable points are brought out, three points that show vigorous thinking on the part of the Foundress, and the mellow wisdom that comes with years, together with a certainty of prevision which was the gift of the Holy Ghost to her, a peculiar inspiration which the Holy See has never failed to respect throughout the vicissitudes of centuries.

She realized to the full what an innovation her Company was to be, and foresaw the criticism with which it would have to contend, perhaps as soon as her own hand would be gone from the helm. She proposed to have ready to lay before the eyes of the incredulous, the



exact mind of the Holy Father regarding the essential principle of the Company of St. Ursula, namely an *uncloistered virginity, canonically protected*. This is the project of a mind singularly poised: a younger woman would scarcely have attempted it, a character less firm would scarcely have dared it. The document proves that Angela, who spoke so cautiously in her *Rule*, legislating towards a vow of virginity, had no doubt in her own mind as to the ultimate practice of the Company in this matter. Were the eight widows chosen by her in the beginning, simply to watch over the cradle of the institute?

The Bull displays another of the peculiar difficulties to which she foresaw that her daughters would necessarily be exposed: if these young girls were to continue living under the paternal roof, but under vow never to marry, their dowers, customary in mediaeval society, might become the object of cupidity to members of their families. What complications of inheritance, what financial embarrassments, what temptations might beset them? Whether or not experience had so early brought up this question, Angela seems to have laid the problem before the Holy See for solution, so as to prepare the Catholic mind of Brescia once for all against so anomalous a condition. In reply, Rome expressly declared that by entrance into the Company of St. Ursula the members must be considered to have the same rights as if they had entered a monastery of some Religious Order, or had contracted marriage; and this ruling it imposed upon every judge, not to be departed from in any fashion. Herein, once more, there would seem to be an implied intention to erect this new institute upon the same status as that of the old Orders of the Church. The Bull legislated:

“We concede and accord that the said virgins, upon entering the Company, may receive the legacies, inheritances and donations, of whatsoever quality or quantity, that would fall to them upon condition of entering Religion, or of contracting marriage: legacies from any person whatsoever, even by testament that annuls them and devolutes them, even if this be to pious foundations, in case of not observing the stipulated conditions: . . . We declare that by entrance into said Company, anyone must be considered to have satis-

fied upon this point the will of the testators, just as if she had entered a monastery or had contracted marriage. We decree that such goods may not be alienated, and impose this principle upon all judges not to be departed from in any manner. And any decision passed in ignorance or knowledge, by any one whatsoever, clothed in any authority whatsoever, and contrary to this decree, is to be considered null and void."<sup>26</sup>

Thus, it is clear that the Foundress must have insisted that her daughters were not to be deprived of whatever temporal support might come to them, which provision is elsewhere alluded to in her *Counsels*, likewise, and that in practising evangelical poverty under their paternal roof, they were to be safeguarded from pauperism and its attendant embarrassments and dangers. Both as regards Virginity and Poverty, the Holy See, in establishing this precedent, legislated for a new canonical entity in the Church, protecting the Company of St. Ursula on the very same bases as the Monastic Orders.

Finally, with a boldness of inspiration that could be nothing short of supernatural this courageous woman petitioned Rome that as the society's object was to be charity, the instruction of young girls, . . . it might be endued with the power to yield to the exigencies of the time and suit itself to the needs of each age. Did the Foundress foresee the reaction which was to set in towards enclosure? Did she feel already the influence of the coming great Council, or was it her own holy prudence, and caution, or even a spirit of superb breath, that prompted her to be ready, even to the extent of retiring into cloister, should occasion require? What marvellous prevision was hers when she ventured to ask the Holy See to grant her society a privilege almost unknown in the history of religious canons, and moreover to be invested in a Roman-approved institute itself, the privilege of changing its own *Rule*, and that merely by the sanction of the Ordinary? That such a power was so understood in the Ursuline Order, and that it was so carried out, may be made quite clear from its subsequent history.

In reply to this request, Pope Paul III embodied in the original Bull of Approbation, the power to alter, change, and to make new

<sup>26</sup> Postel, I, pp. 239, 240. Bull of Paul III approving.

statutes, . . . which alterations, changes and new statutes were to be considered as approved by the same Apostolic authority.<sup>27</sup>

This remarkable passage was repeated almost word for word in 1612 by Pope Paul V when establishing by Bull the Ursuline Monastery in Paris. Postel draws attention to its importance: "He (the Pope) approves the Constitutions such as were presented to him, with power vested in the Ordinary to change them according to circumstances. . . . This Bull," continues Abbé Postel, "having been the object of a very lively discussion in 1877, we think it wise to give the history of it, and the text." And thus was established in the Ursuline Order that principle of elasticity which made its Foundress assert without hesitation, that her order would last through all ages to be.<sup>28</sup> The late revered pontiff, Pius X, described this characteristic which has always made the Ursuline Institute peculiarly congenial to the mind of the Holy See, when in his *Motu Proprio* of May 8, 1905, to the Ursulines he laid a finger on the adaptability of Angela's idea:

"It has always been in the wishes of the Apostolic See, that religious institutes, notably those devoted to the education of youth, should strive, while carefully preserving their original spirit, to adapt themselves properly to the change of conditions arising in time and circumstances."

## IX

It is interesting to study the working out of this law of change as the Ursuline Order seems to have understood and applied it. The first change made was that of the dress. The second was the alteration made by St. Charles Borromeo, Cardinal Archbishop of Milan,

<sup>27</sup> "ut praeferatur, condita statuta, et ordinationes hujusmodi, alterare et mutare ac de novo facere: quae postquam condita, alterata, mutata et novo facta fuerint, eo ipso praefata auctoritate Apostolica confirmata sint et esse censeantur. . . ." Bull of Paul III to Ursulines, 1544.

<sup>28</sup> "Practerea eisdem Guillelmo, Jacobo et Thoma . . . quaecumque statuta, ordinationes, capitula et decreta, ad ejusdem monasterii, . . . sacrisque canonibus et constitutionibus apostolicis et concilii Tridentini decretis et regularibus dicti ordinis institutis non contraria ac ab Ordinariis prius examinanda et approbanda, faciendi et edendi, ac quoties pro rerum et temporum qualitate seu alias expediens videbitur, illa, praevisis examine et approbatione hujusmodi, immutandi, corrigendi, moderandi, et in melius reformandi, ac etiam alia ex integro condendi, et illa praepositae conventui ac monialibus . . . sub poenis. . . ." Bull of Paul V to the Ursulines of Paris, 1612.

who as will be seen later, made the first real revision of Angela's *Rule*. He changed its reading here and there for clearness, notes Madame Girelli, leaving intact its original substance. Two new things he added, necessary in his opinion for the proper functioning of the society, namely, he placed the institute under the immediate jurisdiction of the Ordinary, who alone should choose and nominate their spiritual father and his substitute, previously chosen by vote of the Company: and he also forbade any outsider to wear its insignia, which at that date had, in Brescia, resolved itself into a black habit with leather cincture (1544). In a kind letter to the members he spoke of their work as one of the spiritual consolations of his visitation: "Thus it is, that in the midst of so many other occupations, we felt no weariness in revising, renewing, and approving your *Rule*, which task we undertook to satisfy your wish and to render you the best assistance we could. . . ." These words sufficiently prove that the alterations had been made according to the letter of the Bull of Pope Paul III. "Then," adds Madame Girelli, whose relation we have been following, "on October 28, 1581, St. Charles had the *Rule* and his Decree of Approbation consigned to the Mother General of the Company"; and this revision is the earliest form of the Primitive *Rule* of St. Angela which has come down to us. It is evident that it was never submitted to Rome for approval of its revised articles.

The Bull of Paris, 1612, as before noted, repeated in almost identical terms the privileges of the Bull of Paul III. The earliest reference to any revision of the *Rule* as carried out by direction of this new Bull, which cloistered the Ursulines of that city, is contained in a letter of approbation from Paul de Gondy, Archbishop of Paris, May 22, 1640, about thirty years after the papal Bull.

The letter is contained in a copy of the Constitutions and runs as follows.

"We make known that this book containing seventy-eight written pages, whereon are reduced to writing the Rules and Constitutions, *lately revised*, of the nuns in our diocese of Paris, has been seen by me and carefully examined. . . . We have approved and confirmed them."



Furthermore, in the preface to this book are stated the reasons for changing certain articles of the original Constitutions, and the method of procedure also is set down, together with the canonical right upon which this procedure is based.

"Our Holy Father, Pope Paul V," says the preface, "in his Bull for the establishment of the monastery of Paris, giving power to the superiors of said monastery to make constitutions and even to change them when need should arise, according to the development of time and circumstances . . . certain ecclesiastics of learning and piety, in a number of conferences held among themselves and with the (Father) Superior of said monastery of Paris, have drawn up the constitutions as follows."

It is to be noted here that the power was invested in the Paris monastery without reference to any other house or group of houses. This power was handed down to the daughter-houses, as for instance, Clermont; and the same privilege was granted in the Bull of the Ursulines of Bordeaux.

Forty years after this, in 1681, the Ursulines of Clermont, offspring of the famous convent in the Rue St. Jacques in Paris, issued a second revision of the Paris constitutions. This edition contains a letter from the Bishop, stating that the nuns had petitioned him to approve their modifications in the constitutions, and that he had agreed to do so. To this statement he adds the list of five points that they modified, namely Great Office, Feast Days, Tourrieres, Abstinence, Time of Morning Exercises, and the selection of the Ecclesiastical Superior. The revisers of the original Paris constitutions had avowed that the new were the old and old were the new, so closely had they adhered to the original spirit, a remark which the Clermont nuns were, on their part, careful to abide by. In the first or Paris revision, it is to be noted, that the text of the changed articles is changed, and the preface of the book gives the reasons for these alterations and the list of them, whereas the Clermont revision merely adds to the old constitutions the Bishop's letter, stating that such and such things are to be substituted for Articles so and so, none but a general reason of impracticability being offered. The Bishop of Clermont refers to the modifications thus:

"Articles which as you have represented to us, cannot be observed in your monasteries, and which you have changed or modified." So is made patent the fact, that even in the Ursuline monasteries with Solemn Vows, episcopal authority alone sufficed, and the Constitutions were not submitted at all to the Holy See for approval of modifications. The working of the two Bulls held good.

Rome, however, had certainly seen a sketch of the Paris Constitutions. From the *Annals of the Ursuline Order* (Vol. I, 231) it is clear that an outline of their proposed substance was sent to Rome together with the original petition addressed to the Holy See for the erection of the monastery in the Rue St. Jacques. The *Annals* state that these Constitutions had been drawn up by some ecclesiastics, notably Jesuits, and that they had been based upon those of Milan and Brescia, preserving the spirit of the primitive institute. How well is shown here that care with which Rome always respects and studies the inspiration of each of the founders of the great Religious Orders.

Coming down to more recent times, we find the Ursulines of Quebec making their own revision under the same authority. In the History of the Ursulines of Quebec it is related, that these nuns followed the Constitutions of Paris . . . "with *such modifications only*, as the circumstances of the times have required, and the proper authority sanctioned: " which clause shows that they too considered themselves empowered to change when necessary, according to Angela's idea.

Once more, as late as 1860, in an edition of the *Regulations*, or *Custom Book*, the Bishop of Clermont refers to the right residing in the Ursuline Order to change its Constitutions without further reference to Rome.

"Relying then," says the Bishop, "upon the Bull of Approbation of the Monastery of Paris, *wherein Pope Paul V authorized the superiors to modify the Constitutions if circumstances required it*, it has now been judged necessary to make some changes in the *Regulations*, which although they demand respect, are of less authority than the Constitutions, and more readily subject to change, as the preface of the Constitutions states."

The manner in which they proceeded to make the changes in this instance is very evident. The episcopal approbation of the book is preceded by a petition signed by a member of the Bishop's council, in which is announced that the Mother Superior of Clermont had submitted to the episcopal authority the modifications made in the new edition of the *Regulations*. The member of the Bishop's council goes on to say, "By your orders, these modifications have been examined with care," and he closes with "I have the honor to propose to you, my Lord, to give your approbation." In the same preface it is announced that the revision has the adhesion of the communities of the Congregation of Paris to whom the project was communicated before being handed in to the printers, but certainly not before it had episcopal approbation.

This, then, is the historical development of the application of Angela's idea. If we would view in proper proportion the thoughts which governed her mind in asking the Holy See to make of the new Company a canonical entity, such a glance as this, down the ensuing ages, is necessary, in order to set in clear light just what she meant in petitioning Rome to give her institute an elasticity which would adapt it to future ages; and it is indeed evident that Rome respected her idea, as emanating from the Holy Ghost.

## X

Angela's declared sanctity had been, as already related, matter of popular acclamation. But in 1568 the Brescian municipality began gathering sworn depositions from living witnesses towards the formal canonization of their favorite. On Monday, June 21, 1568, in the house of Elisabetta da Prato on the Piazza, in the presence of Elisabetta, who was then up in years, and Bianca Porcellaga and Veronica Buzzi (or Bocca), all of whom had been intimate friends and chosen companions of hers, Antonio Romano's sworn testimony was taken, in due form. Then they took that of Maestro Bertolino Boscoli, who remembered her "thirty-four years ago." On the 18th of August following, in the house of Giacomo Chizzola, street of San Pietro e Marcellino, Signor Chizzola himself was sworn in before his own son, Lodovico, and Agostino Gallo, Angela's old friend. Gallo him-

self gave testimony a few months later, in the shop of M. Paolo Giugno, in Brescia, near the Cathedral, before authentic witnesses.

So, before many years, Angela's cult was in full swing, under the benevolent support of Popes, and antecedent to the decree of Boniface VIII, forbidding such honors previous to the canonical Process: in 1768 she was Beatified, and in 1807 came the consummatus: she was Canonized.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> For detailed account of the interest of the Apostolic See in her cult, and the stages of its development, see Appendix, Note D.



## CHAPTER TEN

### THE RULE OF ST. ANGELA MERICI

THE *Rule* which Angela left to her Company is a legacy as valuable today as it was then: one of those flashes of inspired genius which, to quote her own words, is worthy of drawing all the world into its light. In fact, even in this day and age of organizations, constitutions, and companies, the ancient document, diffuse and painstaking as it is, still reads with distinct vigor and masterliness. It breathes that warmth of heart and largeness of spirit which her friends all knew so well and loved; it bespeaks intellect and a singular wisdom: it is lofty and yet it is eminently practical.

In this very hour it is sought by people who live in countries where the government makes it impossible for parents to educate their children in the schools of their convictions, and it is necessary to discover a way by which women can still bring to the young of their own sex the religious training which is indispensable for the salvation of their souls. For this reason, far from relegating the text to a place in the Appendix as a mere document in evidence, it is our purpose to set it here where it belongs in the history of the mind which conceived it.

We have done this *Rule* into English for the first time, after the four centuries of its obscurity, locked up in the Italian, or at best, a French or German translation.

The learned Jesuit Salvatori, compiling his *Life of Angela Merici* at the date of her canonization, declared that he was unable to find the original or any authenticated copy. "I have obtained," he said, "merely a copy of the edition the least altered from the original. That it truly is the copy submitted to me may be seen in the statement of its author. The edition dates from 1673, and was made by P. Gio. Cristoni, Spiritual Director of the Ursulines at that time. This is the passage to which I refer:

'You wonder, pious reader, that since a *Rule* of the Company of St. Ursula in Brescia is already in existence, printed in Bologna by Gio. Recaldini, Nov. 12, 1673, this new one is now being printed in Brescia, arranged differently, and in many places different in sense.

Nevertheless, it is true, I assure you.

A certain religious, prompted by zeal to improve upon and perfect this *Rule*, set hand to the original text without consent of the congregation, which does not desire any other than the one prescribed by and springing from the heart of that servant of God, Madre Angela Merici of Desenzano, Foundress of this Company; the *Rule* which has been observed from 1525 down to the present day with such spiritual profit as is known in all this city, which, with greatest consolation beholds the modesty and good example of these sisters.' "

There is in Italian a second copy, which should be presented in English. This is the modification of Angela's *Rule* which was presented for Episcopal Approbation June 12, 1866, by Countess Girelli of Brescia who adapted the Primitive Company of St. Ursula to present day needs with such high encomium from Pius IX.<sup>1</sup> Mme. Girelli's modifications we are including in the footnotes, for the benefit of those who might wish to make practical use of them.

And now let Angela speak in her lovely *Proemio*.

#### PROEMIO

Since to you, my most dear Daughters and Sisters, God has given grace to withdraw from the darkness of this miserable world and to work together for His Divine Majesty, you owe Him infinite thanks that to you specially He has conceded so singular a gift: because how many great persons there are, empresses, queens, duchesses, and the like, that would wish to be considered one of the least of your handmaids, esteeming your condition so much more worthy, so much better than their own?

Hence, my Sisters, I exhort and pray you, chosen to be true and inviolate spouses of the Son of God, that first, you realize how important a thing and what a new and admirable dignity that is; then, that you strive as much as possible to be faithful to that to which God has called you. And seek to embrace all the ways and means necessary to prosper and persevere to the end, because no good

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, Note F, *A Visit to Madame Girelli*.

principle suffices in itself, without perseverance. Any person can maintain herself if she will employ the ways and means necessary, because there is little or no difference between saying deliberately, I do not wish to serve God any more, and not following the means that are at one's disposal. How much more the need then, my Sisters, for us to be vigilant, the more desirable the state to which we are called; that is, to be spouses and daughters of God, and queens in heaven.

But here there is need to be wary and prudent, because the greater and more valuable the enterprise, the more fatigue and danger you incur: there is no way out of evil except by opposing it since we are here placed in the midst of snares and dangers: for our flesh and sensuality not being dead, there will be arrayed against us our enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil, roaring and encircling us with so many tricks and so much cunning, beyond recounting, to find out in what way they can devour us.

But on this account, my sisters, do not be discouraged: because if you try in future as a true spouse of Our Lord should, and observe this *Rule* as the road you are to travel, the way laid out for your benefit, I have firm faith and hope in the Divine goodness, that not only we may surmount all the perils and difficulties, but may accomplish this even with great glory; and our joy shall be in our victory; so that we shall pass this brief life so consolingly that all our sorrow will be transformed into happiness, and we shall find that the thorny, steep, and stony path shall become flowering, smooth, pleasant, and covered with finest gold; for the angels and the celestial choirs will be with us constantly, since we participate in their angelic life.<sup>2</sup>

So, dear Sisters, let us all, with one will, embrace this holy *Rule*, which God by His grace has offered us.

Arm yourselves with the observance of these holy precepts; practice them so faithfully, that like Judith, spiritedly cutting off the head of Holofernes, we, decapitating the devil, may gloriously go on to the heavenly country, in such wise that to all, in heaven and earth, great glory and triumph shall arise.

Now, let all of you, by the grace of God, with a willing and eager heart, pay heed.

<sup>2</sup> Note the reference here to the angels accompanying the maidens, as in the vision of Brudazzo.

## I. OF THE RECEIVING OF THE YOUNG GIRLS

Let it be remembered first of all that any one who desires to enter or to be admitted into this Company must be a virgin.

Then with a firm intention to serve God in this kind of a life, she must enter gladly and of her own free will. Third, she must not be bound by any monastic vows, nor by engagements to any man in the world. Fourth, if she have father, mother or other guardians, she must first ask their permission; after which the Governors of the Company should talk to her in order to discover if there be any legitimate impediment to her entering this holy obedience. Fifthly, she must be at least twelve years old when she presents herself, fifteen when she is invested and taken into the Chapter, and eighteen or twenty when she is professed and inscribed on the authentic register. Let it be remembered that those of minor age may be received solely for the purpose of teaching them the way of this Company.

II. OF THE CLOTHING OF THE SISTERS <sup>3</sup>

Let it be borne in mind that the costume should be modest and simple as truly befits a virginal modesty: let each be dressed with her bodice properly fastened, and wear a veil of linen, not too fine and transparent.

The dress should be of linen or common cloth and black in color. [And they are to wear a long leather cincture, in sign of exterior and interior mortification, and perfect chastity: and the habit proper to the members of this Company shall consist in this veil of linen and the leather cincture. Of this they shall be deprived when they are not obedient to their superiors, or when, for some other reason, they are expelled from the Company; and any such person who does

<sup>3</sup> Countess Girelli sums up the legislation on Dress as follows: "The clothes should be modest and simple as truly befits virginal purity. Let each one wear her dress well fastened, and let it be in no way transparent." This statute she supplements with the following, Note 2, p. 52, "The Foundress gave her daughters no distinctive habit: after her death they assumed a leather cincture, a dress of black cloth with a little white veil on the head, simply a modification of the dress of the day. The *Rule* was most wise in requiring a dress conformable to everyday usage, summed up by the saint in two words, 'modest and simple': avoiding, as much as possible, all luxury, but suited to virginity, and the spirit of poverty which they were to practice."



not divest herself of this dress, shall incur excommunication, by decree of His Eminence, Charles Cardinal of Saint Praxedes, Visitor Apostolic, according to the holy Canons.] <sup>4</sup>

The slippers, or sandals, and the shoes, shall be black, and of a modest simple style. There shall be no ruffles, plaits, or frills on the chemise. The sisters shall not follow the fashions, nor wear novelties, nor transparent materials and other vanities that could sully their conscience, scandalize others, or be contrary to virginal modesty.

### III. OF INTERCOURSE WITH THE WORLD

Let it be remembered, that they are not to have anything to do with women of bad character. Second, On no account should they lend ear to the addresses of men, or through women either, especially in secret. Third, They are not to go to weddings, nor to balls, jousts, nor other similar worldly spectacles. Fourth, Let them avoid loitering on the balconies, at doorways, or in the streets, alone or accompanied, and this for many reasons. Fifth, Going along the road, let them walk with eyes cast down, and with their person modestly covered, and let them go quickly, not delaying, nor stopping here or there along the way, standing to gaze curiously at anything; for in every place there are dangers, many insidious things, and diabolical snares.

If mothers or other natural superiors desire them to incur these, or forbid their fasting, prayer, or confession, or any sort of good work, see that the matter be properly reported to the Governors of the Company,<sup>5</sup> who will attend to it.

### IV. OF FASTING

Remember that each one should desire to practice bodily fasts, as a thing necessary, and as the way and means to those true spiritual

<sup>4</sup> Salvatori marks with asterisks all passages ascribed to St. Charles Borromeo. We distinguish these by brackets.

<sup>5</sup> "It is to be noted here, clearly, that the Saint required her daughters to tell their Superiors about any obstacle which they encountered in the observance of *Rule*, so that they would not follow their own judgment in the matter, and arouse feeling in their families, and that they might not be hindered without a reasonable motive." Girelli, *op. cit.*, p. 53, Note 3.

fasts, by which all vices and errors of the soul are suppressed. To this the example of all the saints and the entire life of Jesus Christ, — our only Way to Heaven, — invites us clearly: wherefore, Holy Mother Church entones this in the ears of all the faithful, saying: "Who by fasting of the body dost curb our vices, dost lift up our minds, dost give us strength and reward."<sup>6</sup>

As the appetite was the origin of all our ills, so fast and abstinence become the principle and means of all our good and spiritual profit. Hence, we exhort each one to fast, especially on certain days in the year.

Besides those fast-days which Holy Mother Church commands, all will observe the following: —

*First:* Fast all of Advent.

*Second:* Fast three days a week beginning the first Wednesday after Epiphany Sunday.

*Third:* After the octave of Easter, fast three days a week, namely, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

*Fourth:* Fast the three Rogation days which Holy Church celebrates before Ascension, to implore Divine aid for the Christian people.

*Fifth:* Fast every day after the Ascension, and likewise remain in prayer with as much fervor of spirit as possible, from Pentecost to Pasqua di Maggio, asking in your prayers that great promise made by Jesus Christ to His elect and His benefactors.

However, because I do not wish the members of the Company to be imprudent, you must warn them, that no one ought to fast as above ordained without the advice of a spiritual father and the Governor of this Company, who have power to diminish these fasts as they deem expedient.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Preface of Mass for Ash Wednesday.

<sup>7</sup> "Observe here the great discretion with which the Saint sets forth the injunction of fasting, so that no one, dismayed by the apparent austerity in this Chapter, will give up the inestimable blessings of the Company. Note that she exhorts and does not command; and that, after the exhortation, she says again that they should not wish to do it if it is not discreet; and that on this head she subjects the sisters to the double judgment of a spiritual father and the Governors, by whom anyone who is not able to observe these fasts shall be easily dispensed." Girelli, *op. cit.*, p. 53, Note 4.

## V. OF PRAYER

Each one of the sisters should be solicitous about prayer, mental as well as vocal, which is a companion to fasting. For Scripture says, "prayer is good, with fasting." And in the Bible we read, "Anna, daughter of Phanuel, who day and night served God in the Temple, with fasting and prayer." And as by fasting we mortify the carnal appetites and the senses so by prayer we beg God for the true grace of spiritual life; hence, from the great need we have of Divine aid, we must pray always with mind and heart, as it is written, "We need always to pray." To all we counsel frequent vocal prayer, by means of which, exercising the corporal senses, we prepare the mind. Whence, each one of you, every day will say, at least, the Office of the Blessed Virgin and the Seven Penitential Psalms, with devotion and attention; because in saying the office we are speaking with God. And whoever does not know how to say the Office, will be taught by the sisters who do know.

Those who do not know how to read will say every day for Matins, thirty-three Pater Nosters and thirty-three Ave Marias in memory of the thirty-three years that Jesus Christ dwelt in this world for love of us. Then at Prime, say seven Paters and seven Aves in honor of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. And they say the same number similarly, for each one of the other canonical hours, Tierce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline.<sup>8</sup>

To afford matter and some method in mental prayer, we exhort each one to raise her mind to God and to exercise herself in it every day; and thus, or in some manner, in the secret of her heart, let her say:<sup>9</sup>

*"My Saviour, illumine the darkness of my heart, and grant me grace rather to die than to offend Thy Divine Majesty any more. Guard,*

<sup>8</sup> "The Saint ordained the daily recitation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin. Since in our times it is rare that a girl does not know how to read, it seems better to substitute a third part of the Rosary as a more common and convenient devotion, calculating that the majority of the sisters will not have time to apply to the constant practice of the Office, being occupied in work and the discharge of household tasks. However, those who have time and are able, would do well to conform faithfully to the counsel of the Saint. Instead of the Psalms, may be substituted with greater profit a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and a little spiritual reading." From Girelli, *Regola*, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> The famous prayer of Angela Merici.

*O Lord, my affections and my senses, that they may not stray in any direction, nor lead me away from the light of Thy Face, the satisfaction of every afflicted heart.*

*"Alas for me, that entering into the secret of my own heart, for shame I dare not lift my eyes to heaven, because I know I deserve to be cast alive into hell. And seeing in myself so many errors, such ugliness, such shameful things, and so many deformities, I am constrained with terrible fears and imaginings, day and night, going, staying, working, thinking, to raise to heaven my cries, and to implore of Thee, O Lord, mercy and time for penance!*

*"Wherefore, O Lord, deign to forgive me my many offenses, and all the faults I have committed from my baptismal day up to this hour. Deign, also, O my Saviour, to forgive the sins of my father and mother, of my relatives and friends, and of all the world. For this I pray, by Thy most holy Passion, by Thy Precious Blood shed for love of us, by Thy sacred Name Jesus. May it be blest in heaven and on earth! and by all the celestial choirs of angels and archangels.*

*"Woe is me, and alas, O Lord! that I have so long delayed beginning to serve Thy Divine Majesty. Unhappy am I that as yet I have not shed a drop of my blood for love of Thee, and have not held myself in obedience to Thy Divine precepts; so that adversity has even made me bitter, because of the little love I have had for Thee!*

*"Lord, I am sorry and my heart is wrung, that like a blind person I have not known Thee, and have not cared to participate in Thy most sacred Passion, when, if I could, I ought willingly to shed my own blood to cure the blindness of souls. But, O my Saviour, my only Life and my Hope, I pray Thee deign to receive this my most vile and sinful heart and to burn up in it all its guilty attachments and passions, in the burning furnace of the Divine Love.*

*"I beseech Thee, Lord, to receive all my self-will, which by the infection of sin, is unable to distinguish good from evil. Receive O*



*Lord all my thoughts, words, and deeds, all my being, interior and exterior, which I lay at the feet of Thy Divine Majesty, beseeching Thee that Thou wilt accept it, though so utterly unworthy!"*

#### VI. OF DAILY ATTENDANCE AT MASS

Each one shall go to Mass every day, and shall hear at least one entire Mass, with modesty and devotion; because in Holy Mass are found, in a way unique above all others, all the merits of the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and the greater attention, faith, and contrition one brings to it, the more she participates in those blessed merits, and the greater the consolation she receives. Thus it will be like a spiritual Communion.

But take care not to loiter too long in the church: if you wish to pray, go into your own room, and there, retired, pray as much as your spirit and conscience dictates.

#### VII. OF CONFESSION

Confession is urged, as the necessary medicine for the ills of our souls. Each should, then, present herself before the priest as before God the Eternal Judge, and there, sorrowfully, with a sincere mind and a firm resolution to renounce sin, confess all her sins and ask pardon, and bear herself towards the confessor with such reverence as befits a pious and devout person. Every first Friday of the month let all assemble in a special church,<sup>10</sup> and all communicate from the hands of the Spiritual Director of the Company.

#### VIII. OF OBEDIENCE

We exhort each one to observe holy obedience, the only true negation of self-will; because obedience founded upon charity is a source of great light in man, rendering all his works good and acceptable.

Each one of you should obey first the Commandments of God,

<sup>10</sup> "If for some reason they cannot attend the church appointed for the Company's monthly Communion prescribed by the Saint, each one should make it a point to approach the Sacraments on the First Friday of the month, in order to carry out as much as possible the intention of the Saint in establishing this Communion day." Girelli, *op. cit.*, p. 55, Note 6.

as Scripture says: Cursed is he who does not serve the Commandments.

Second, obey him who governs Mother-Church, because He Who is Truth has said: Who hears you, hears Me, and who despises you, despises Me.

Third, obey your bishops and pastors, your own spiritual director, and the governors of the Company with its other superiors.

Fourth, obey your father and mother and other superiors at home, of whom we counsel you to ask pardon once a week as a token of submission and for the conservation of charity.

Fifth, obey all the laws and statutes of the civil authorities.

Over and above all this, be docile to the Divine inspirations, which under the judgment and approval of your spiritual father, you may recognize as coming from the Holy Ghost.

In fine, we ought to obey God, and for His love, we ought, in the words of the Apostle, be subject to every creature, unless there be commanded something contrary to the Divine honor and one's own good and salvation.

#### IX. OF VIRGINITY

Each one should preserve holy virginity, although our *Rule* does not require any vow, excepting the firm resolution to devote to God her virginity, the which is so greatly to be esteemed, as it makes her the sister of the angels, victor over the passions, queen of the virtues, and possessor of every good.

So, above all, keep the heart pure, and the conscience clean from every bad thought, from every shadow of ill-will, discord, evil, suspicion, and all wicked desires and intentions.

But be joyous, and always replete with charity, faith, and hope in God. And let your conversations with your neighbor be reasonable and modest, as St. Paul says: *Modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus*: that is, Let your modesty be known to all men. All your actions and conversation should be modest and proper, not naming God in vain, not swearing, but simply saying with modesty, No, No, Yes, Yes, as Jesus teaches; not answering haughtily, not willingly doing things carelessly; not remaining angry; not murmuring; not repeating any evil thing; and finally, not performing any act or ges-

ture unworthy of one who bears the name of servant of Jesus Christ. But all your words, acts and movements should be always instructive and edifying, from an ever-increasing charity in your hearts. Each one should be disposed rather to die than ever to consent to sully so sacred a joy and treasure.

#### X. OF POVERTY

We exhort each one to embrace poverty, not merely that which pertains to temporal things, but the true poverty of spirit through which man divests his heart of all attachment and hope in things created, transitory, and selfish, in order to possess all his good in God; outside of God he sees himself despoiled of all, a nothing in himself, whereas having God, he has all. Scripture says: *Beati pauperes spiritu, quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum*; that is, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. And therefore each one should strive to despoil herself of everything, and to set all her good, her love, her delight, not in robes, nor in food, nor in relatives, nor in herself, nor her own providing or discernment, but in God alone, and in His benign and ineffable Providence.

For the Evangelist says: *Quaeriti ergo primum regnum Dei, et justitiam ejus, et haec omnia adjicientur vobis. Matt. 6.* Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you. And again he says: *Nolite solliciti esse dicentes, quid manducabimus, aut quid bibemus?* that is, Be not solicitous, saying, What shall we eat and what shall we drink? because your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things; as if he said: Do not be concerned for any temporal need, for God alone knows, and can and will provide for you, and He greatly desires and wills your good and your happiness.

#### XI. OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OFFICERS OF THE COMPANY

[As the Council of Trent confides strictly to Bishops, the care of unmarried women who live under regular discipline in monasteries,

[N. B. This chapter dates from St. Charles' time. It is entirely omitted in Mme. Girelli's modern edition of the *Rule of St. Angela*.]

so bishops and pastors should take no less care of those who are voluntarily living in their own homes, devoting their virginity to the glory of God; the more so, on account of the greater and more varied dangers of such a state.

For this reason, the Company ranged under the name of St. Ursula, shall recognize and regard as their father, pastor, and superior, the present Bishop of Brescia and his legitimate successors, to whose jurisdiction they shall be subject, and to whose paternal and pastoral care they are assigned.]

## XII. OF THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR OF THE COMPANY <sup>11</sup>

Since it is not convenient for the Bishop of so large a diocese to occupy himself directly with the affairs of the Company, as befits its conservation and progress, it is necessary for him to substitute a vicar whom all will accept as Father and Superior, rendering him all obedience that is due. It will be the office of the Bishop himself to choose him, and to appoint him as his representative in the Company of St. Ursula; so likewise to the Bishops is reserved the power of confirming, or of changing him at will, as he deems it expedient and better for the Company.

The said Father shall have charge of the general progress of the Company, and shall remove any obstacle that may arise in the government, referring, if need be, to the authority of the Bishop.

The ladies who are governing the Company will hold no meeting without the presence of the said Father, or without his permission and approval; nor may anything be determined without his consent in any meeting in which he does not take part. The girls who ask admission into the Company must first be examined and approved by this Spiritual Director; and any one admitted without being examined and approved by him must not be accepted.

<sup>11</sup> This chapter is listed as Chapter XI by Mme. Girelli's modern edition of the *Rule*, since she omits the preceding Chapter.



XIII. OF THE SUBSTITUTE FOR THE SPIRITUAL  
DIRECTOR

It is good that there be another priest for Substitute or Coadjutor to the Spiritual Director of the Company, in case that if the Company fills out and grows in numbers, one single person cannot supply all its needs, or in case that when the principal head is absent or lacking, there may be one who is experienced in its spiritual government, and devoted to its welfare.

This Substitute should not have any other power in the Company's affairs except those conceded to him by the Bishop, and that, in so far as the Spiritual Director shall ordain.

The two feast days that are to be kept,<sup>12</sup> the one of St. Catherine, the other of St. Agnes, shall be observed in the presence of the Bishop, who shall be advised in time so that he can arrange to be there; and in particular when one of the members, through an increase of devotion and perfection, shall make publicly a Vow of Virginity. It is to be remarked, however, that in making such vows publicly they are not to be understood as anything but Simple Vows. If, on these Feast-days, the presence of the Bishop cannot be obtained, the Spiritual Director of the Company will supply for everything.

## XIV. OF THE MOTHER GENERAL OF THE COMPANY

There will be a Mother General of all the Company, whose office shall be for life, and who shall be elected by a two-thirds majority of those who take part in the election; in presence of the Bishop, or at least, of the Spiritual Director of the Company; and she who is elected shall have no authority until her election is confirmed by the Bishop.

In electing the Mother, for which purpose shall be convened all the Lady Governors, all the Mistresses, and Advisers, together with all the members who have been admitted into the Company, they should be careful to elect one who is very edifying, of exemplary life

<sup>12</sup> Note 9 from Girelli; *op. cit.*, p. 57. "It should be considered just and laudable to add to these feasts that of St. Angela also, regarding her as principal Foundress of this Company in which God Himself made her Mother and Mistress."

and many years of tried virtue, so that such authority may have a power commensurate with that which she has to direct, and may conduce to that perfection to which all ought to aspire. Above all, she should be known to be a person of great charity and kindness towards the daughters of this Company, so that with maternal compassion she may be quick to help them in all their wants.

When they assemble for the election of the Mother, each shall bring with her a ballot on which is written the name of the one she wishes to propose, and shall put it, folded, into a box prepared for the purpose, in the place where the election is to be held.

In the election, an unmarried woman shall always be preferred to a widow,<sup>13</sup> as being of a more noble state, and resembling those she is to govern, and they may consider that they will find greater love and charity for the Company in one who has been its own daughter, nourished, so to speak, with its own milk. It is probable that the virtue requisite for such a Mother will shine with greater splendor in one who has always lived the life of virginity. However, if because of youth, or some other reason, they do not find anybody suitable, let them elect a widow endowed by God with the proper gifts and conditions.

Though the Mother's term of office is for life, still if she becomes incapacitated because of age or grave infirmity, or if some other reason makes it better for the Company, the Bishop may find it expedient to remove her.

Although the one chosen for Mother should be mature in mind and tried in virtue, rather than advanced in years, nevertheless, it is fitting that she be not less than forty years old when elected; and if she is one of the unmarried, she should have been ten years in the Company, or if a widow, she should have been ten years in the office of Vicar.

#### XV. OF THE VICAR

In order that the main body of the Company may never at any time be without a head who can govern and rule, it is very necessary that the Mother have a Vicar, who shall take her place in absence

<sup>13</sup> Note 9 from Girelli's, *op. cit.*, p. 57: "Even if the Saint did not stipulate the admission of widows, it is clear that they were accepted when they were of firm determination to live a life of chastity."

and attend to any need that may arise. The Vicar should possess such qualities and virtues as would render her worthy of her office; one might say, in brief, that these are the same gifts and virtues that are necessary in the Superior. This Vicar shall be one of the four Assistants; she shall be elected immediately after the Mother, and before the election of the other Assistants. The election shall be carried out in the manner prescribed above for the Mother, and it shall be confirmed like that of the Mother, by the Bishop. Although on all occasions when the Mother is absent the Vicar will take her place; nevertheless, the latter can never make any innovation in the Mother's absence, nor change anything which the Mother shall have ordained, but simply carry out that which has either been ordered by the Mother, or prescribed by the *Rule*.

On every occasion she shall have the first place after the Superior of whom she is the Vicar. When the Mother is present the Vicar has no more authority than the other Assistants. While the Mother is living she shall depend in all things upon her, possessing only such powers as the Mother concedes to her. Upon the death of the Mother, she shall assume the government until a new Mother is elected, and during this interval it is her business to attend to everything necessary for the obsequies and burial of the dead, and for the new election according to the *Rule* of the Company.

She may never, during the lifetime of the Mother nor when she is dead, admit any members either to the Chapter or to the Company, unless the Assistants and Lady Governors assent. And what is here said of the reception is also intended for cases of dismissal from the Company, both these powers being reserved to the Office of the Mother. Any admission or dismissal done in absence of the Mother shall be null and void. The Vicar is to do nothing of any importance in the death or absence of the Mother except in such matters as are hers alone to do, or urgent necessity requires.

While the election of a new Mother ends the term of office of the Vicar as well as of the other Assistants, still, she may be confirmed anew if the General Assembly consider it expedient.

XVI. OF THE ASSISTANTS <sup>14</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that it is better in the opinion of the wise to have one Mother Superior over all the Company, so that the one and not the many do the ruling: still, considering the need of so many of Christ's servants, exposed to so many dangers of body and soul, and that the strength of one person cannot suffice without harm and disorder among those confided to her charge, it is necessary to have four other ladies as Assistants with whom the Mother can consult in all the affairs that may arise.

Without the advice and consent of the majority or at least two of these she will not hold any deliberation of any moment, either relating to the entire Company or to any special business concerning it, so that they may proceed with greater light, prudence and spirit; thus there will ensue greater glory to God, peace and progress in the Company, and better results, for it is certain, in common opinion, that two eyes see much more than one.

The qualities of these Assistants should be like those of the Mother; and they will be elected by the Company in the same way and at the same election with the Mother. They will be elected immediately after the Mother, and the election will be similarly confirmed by the Bishop. Those who are made Assistants should be conspicuous for maturity in virtue and spirituality rather than in years. Nevertheless, in all justice, they should not be elected

<sup>14</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, p. 55, Note 7: "This part of the *Rule* has proved impracticable in our times on account of the multiplicity of offices demanded, and the difficulty in gathering together the members for the various assemblies. It seems to us that two assemblies will suffice: one for members already admitted to full observance of *Rule*, and the other for the young girls received for training in the spirit of the Company. So we have abandoned the numerous officers which they had in the time of the Saint, such as Spiritual Director, Substitute, the Vicar to the Mother Superior, the Mistress of the spiritual training of the candidates, and the many Assistants. As Angela appointed three officers for each Neighborhood, so the same number of Assistants can serve in each parish. However, in assigning the special duties of these officers, the very wise document of the Saint was adhered to, so that the substance of the *Rule* remains intact, only reduced to simpler form." *Op. cit.*, p. 57, Note 10: "Under the simple title of Assistants may be comprised all the duties which St. Angela prescribed for her Assistants, Lady Governors and Mistresses; and thus, instead of many matrons for the direction of the young girls, there is retained only one so as to secure as much union and uniformity as possible in giving the young members their spiritual education. And if on account of numbers or anything else, one person does not prove sufficient, she can be assisted in her office by some one of the more tried and virtuous Assistants."



Assistant unless more than thirty years old, and if virgins, should be ten years in the Company, or if widows, should have been already employed five years in the government.

The office of Assistant shall not be for life but only as long as is the term of the Mother at whose installation they were elected. But they may be reconfirmed, and in case one of them should die before the Mother, another suited to the office will be elected by the Mother, the Assistants, the Lady Governors, the Mistresses and Advisers, in presence of the Spiritual Director, and with his consent.

The duties of the Assistant will be to help the Mother as much as possible. At least once a week they will convene to deal with matters that arise, to provide help for the needs of the Company, or to treat of business. Thus it will not be necessary to inconvenience the Lady Governors all of them to meet, yet there will be nothing left unprovided for.

One of the Assistants will be chosen, when the Mother cannot do it, to take care of the money and the accounts of expenditures and revenues in the Company. She will carry out with diligence and charity that which has been determined in consultation, or whatever the Mother ordains. She should be a person whom they all judge capable of the duties of the office. She is to be named by the Mother, and confirmed by the Assistants and the rest of the governing officers.

#### XVII. OF THE LADY GOVERNORS

It is to be hoped that with the blessing of God the number of His servants and spouses will increase; so it is expedient to have eight more women distinguished less by age than by judgment, prudence, and other qualities, who shall divide the city into eight sections, each having special charge of the members who live in her respective section. Below are the rules and methods with which they should govern the daughters under their care.

The Lady Governors will be elected and confirmed in the manner already prescribed for Assistants, and from among them the Assistants and the Mother General shall ordinarily be elected. If one dies or is in some way lacking, another will be elected in her place, as in case of Assistants.

To these Governors it belongs to report all the needs they observe, either in the Company in general or in their own special Neighborhood, but none of them may interfere with the affairs that belong to their sisters, because she whose charge it is, will provide; and in case she cannot, she can represent the matter to the Mother General and her Assistants, and leave it to them.

No member may be presented to the Spiritual Director nor to the Mother General, either to be clothed, or received by the Company, or to make vows, unless she be first examined by the Governor of that Neighborhood of the city in which the person dwells; and also the Mistress must be informed of it who acts in this Neighborhood as minister to the Lady Governor. Not even the Mother General may receive or present any young girl to the council of the government, without observing the established order which is prescribed, so that confusion and disorder may not arise in the management, but that it may proceed with union and conformity, and those girls whom it is desired to introduce into the Company, be better known and examined.

If it should happen that they elect one of the Lady Governors as Assistant to the Mother General, they must elect another to take her place. The age proper to these is the same as for the Assistants.

#### XVIII. OF THE FUNCTIONS OF THE LADY GOVERNORS

The Lady Governors should have particular information about the members under their special care. They should know the name of each, her home and her family: they should be acquainted with her state and condition in life, her habits, her ways, and her social environment, at home and elsewhere.

They will see to it that the Mistresses teach the young members those things which the *Rule* appoints to be taught. This will be easy, if at times the Mistresses are required to render account of their teaching; and the Governors should employ greater diligence with such as are suspected of negligence, or indifference, and little spirit, or with those whom they see in still greater danger.

They should be informed whether each member has a confessor

designated, and find out if she approach the sacraments of Confession and Communion at the appointed times; if she keep to the same confessor or change often; and if the members need any help, in any way for soul or body. While the principal care is for the soul, it is a work of charity to help them corporally, particularly when any member comes to need, through infirmity or poverty, lest on this account she become discouraged and endanger her soul.

Still more care must be taken if one should be at the point of death. The Lady Governor must arrange that two other members of the Company, whom they judge capable of helping the sister in such circumstances, be always present with her. When a sister dies the Lady Governor will see that decent and proper burial be given her, at once notifying the Mother General and the Spiritual Father, in order that these likewise may perform their respective duties.

The Governors will take special care of the Novices, seeing to it that the Mistresses and Advisers visit them and make every effort to get the minutest information concerning their life and habits; in order that when they come to be admitted into the Chapter or into the Company, a certain and true account can be given to the other officers.

Each of the Governors should confer, at least once a fortnight, with the Mistress and the Adviser of her Neighborhood, to provide for the needs of members under their charge. She will be careful to hold the Neighborhood Assembly at the stated time, examining into and providing for the wants of the members, and making note of the needs that arise, strive to attend to them; or if she cannot, she will present the matter at the next General Assembly.

If any one of the members is disobedient, or behaves badly in any other way, the Governor will give her a salutatory penance, which she thinks will help her, considering the deed and the quality of the person.

Above all, let the Governors love with a true and deep love the sisters who are under their protection, with such a love as they owe to such dear spouses and beloved children of Jesus Christ, *striving to enfold them in a maternal tenderness*; not looking upon them as mean and ordinary women, but recognizing and loving in them the God for whose love they have undertaken their charge.

## XIX. OF THE MISTRESSES

Besides the Lady Governor it is necessary that there be eight others, as Mistresses, who, subject to the Lady Governors, can more often and with more intimacy, deal with the members of the Company under them, loving and comforting them; reprehending them, when necessary, in the spirit and charity which Our Saviour displayed; and when they find they can not obtain the results they desire, on account of obstinacy or incorrigibility, they will refer the whole matter to the Governor so that she herself can manage it.

The Mistresses shall have particular charge of the members confided to their care, trying to understand their nature, inclinations, and ways. They must take account of their conversation both at home and abroad, by visiting them personally and when least expected.

These Mistresses should ordinarily be virgins,<sup>15</sup> and such persons as by maturity of mind, exemplary life, and evident virtue, can, in the judgment of all, have committed to them the important charge of instructing and promoting and leading to perfection so many servants of the Lord. It is necessary that all the virtue possible shine in them, so that the authority which they may lack on account of their youth, may be theirs through the esteem and opinion which people have of their virtue.

They will be elected and confirmed in the same manner as the Lady Governors, to each of whom it belongs to propose for so important an office the one that seems best to her in her own Neighborhood.<sup>16</sup> They shall observe all that the *Rule* prescribes, reading it themselves, so as to have it at command when necessary.

The function of the Mistress will be, as her name implies, to teach the members under her; and this is to be accomplished first by her own example, so that they may find in it a living picture of the life they are to lead in the Company of St. Ursula. The Mistresses should often send for them and, with sincere kindness and in the spirit of charity, urge them to the attainment of that perfection to

<sup>15</sup> Countess Girelli begins her chapter on Mistresses with this paragraph, omitting the two preceding.

<sup>16</sup> Countess Girelli's edition states it thus: "They shall be elected by the governing board, and shall remain in office at the good pleasure of superiors." P. 36.



which they are called; to adopt earnestly the means, to avoid the occasions that may hold them back, and to apply their strength in keeping the *Rule* perfectly. They will give them the following precepts at the Assembly of the Neighborhood:

*Observe Commandments.* First, by observing the Commandments of God and Holy Church, they will openly display that reverence and fear which they owe the Divine Majesty, remembering that though the Commandments ought to be observed by all Christians, they themselves are more bound to comply with them.

*Especially 4th Commandment.* They should most diligently observe that one in which is commanded the reverence and obedience due to father and mother and all superiors who have governance over them; a commandment in which they easily fail, but which, being well observed, will make all the rest easy.

*Domestic Virtues.* It is only fitting that whoever professes to be the spouse and servant of Christ, should imitate the virtue of her Lord; and since the life of Christ furnishes many illustrations of charity, patience, and kindness, let them show themselves *in their homes* full of charity, patience, humility and kindness.

*Especially Prudence.* Let them not converse indifferently with all sorts of people, but with those alone who are of this same life, and through whose conversation they can acquire good odor, and a good name and some benefit; and let them absolutely avoid worldly women and any of bad reputation. Let them never converse with men unless accompanied, and then only when necessity requires.

*Avoid Scandal.* The sisters should always bear in hand the lighted lamp of good works with whose splendor they are to impress those who see them; but I exhort them to take great care to avoid giving scandal, as they will certainly do if they talk too much, and of useless, worldly things; and much more will they give it by murmuring, or by listening to others murmuring. Great scandal will be taken if they are seen at windows, or loitering in doorways, or stopping in the streets to talk.

*Chastity.* Let them be firm in their holy resolution or vow (those who have made one) to preserve their virginity, not only that of the body, which once lost, is never recovered, but also of the mind, recollecting how necessary to this end is the custody of the senses.

*Modest Dress.* Let their dress be such as is appropriate to their institute and spiritual life, and conformable to their *Rule*: hence,<sup>17</sup> they should go about well covered, with veil and headdress not transparent, but thick; they should avoid those delicate and fine things in the use of which purity and virginal integrity is difficult or impossible to preserve.

*Sacraments.* They should frequent the Holy Sacrament at least once a month and oftener, if the Spiritual Father deem it expedient; let them be assiduous in hearing sermons and lectures,<sup>18</sup> in which there is always something to learn which will be to their spiritual advantage.

*Mass.* When not prevented by some reasonable consideration, they will try to go to Mass every morning, striving to have interior devotion at the Holy Sacrifice, and to give edification.

*Teaching Christian Doctrine.* Remember that according to the judgment of their confessor, all of them must carry on some charitable work, especially that of Christian instruction. In this let them be prompt in obeying superiors, and so conduct themselves that they will not fail to teach good conduct as well as good doctrine.

*Change of Abode.* Those who, on account of poverty, have no convenient home of their own and are obliged to live with somebody else, must not do this without advice of their confessor, and the Lady Governor who has charge of them.

*Retirement.* Remember that while it is praiseworthy to stay in church, still, when in the judgment of those who direct their souls, they have satisfied necessity and devotion, let them go home; for it is not a good thing to be seen much abroad, and the delay may greatly inconvenience those at home; and all the time that they stay at home,<sup>19</sup> they procure for themselves as great an interior devotion as is the edification they give by their retirement.

*Avoid the Streets.* To go out much into the streets without necessity is very contrary to their profession. So let them not go through the city except when some need demands it, or they are told to do so by the Adviser; or to go to the Assembly meetings; or to take

<sup>17</sup> Countess Girelli omits this point. See p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Countess Girelli merely says: "Assiduous in hearing the Word of God." P. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Countess Girelli merely substitutes the following: "All the time they are in church let them be recollected interiorly and exteriorly." P. 40.

part in the Processions,<sup>20</sup> which all will attend unless unavoidably detained, when they will excuse themselves with humility and respect.

*Fasting.* Though they are not obliged under pain of any sin to observe the fasts of *Rule*, we exhort all to strive to practise these fasts according to their strength with the counsel of their confessor.

*Confessors.* Make them understand that each one must have a confessor,<sup>21</sup> special and stable, whom they are not permitted to change without leave from the Spiritual Director of the Company.

*Oratory.* Every last Sunday of the month all will repair to the Oratory of the Company where the *Rule* will be read publicly, so that hearing it, they may strive to execute it. And the first Friday of the month all will Communicate in the same chapel unless reasonably hindered; in which case they will in all humility make their excuses. They will not leave the city without permission.

Besides teaching these things, the Mistresses will take special charge of the novices and see that they are instructed in these regulations; in doing this they should become well acquainted with the habits and ways of the novices, so as to be ready when called upon in Chapter or in the General Assembly to give information to the governing officers.<sup>22</sup>

## XX. OF THE ADVISERS

It is not always possible, nor is it at all times proper for Mistresses or Teachers, on account of their youth, to go wherever the needs of the young girls under their care may require. So there must be other ladies who will make visits upon occasion and report the particulars, giving minute information to the Lady Governor and the

<sup>20</sup> These religious processions on feast days of the Church were very popular in Brescia during Angela's lifetime, as they are still in parts of Italy. Countess Girelli does not mention the point. See p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, p. 57, Note 11: "In some extraordinary case they may change confessor; the thing to note is to seek advice only upon an absolute change."

<sup>22</sup> For this Mme. Girelli substitutes the following: "Finally, the Mistress should take the greatest care of the novices, procuring them instruction in the aforesaid duties, and managing to know well their habits and conduct, so as to give full information to superiors when the novices come to be admitted definitely into the Company. They must see that they go to Communion with the others every first Friday of the month, and not absent themselves from the prescribed meetings."

Mistress under whom they serve, so that these can rectify any deviation from the right path.

These ladies shall be called Advisers. It shall be their duty to summon the sisters to the Neighborhood Assembly when the Mistress has something to confer with them about, or when the Lady Governor has to assemble them, or when the Mother General summons them according to *Rule*.

The Advisers should be equal in number to the Lady Governors and Mistresses so that each Neighborhood may have its Adviser, its Lady Governor and Mistress, to whom the Adviser shall act as assistant, as occasion may arise. The Adviser should excel not less in virtue and good habits than in years; they should be mature, and experienced in their way of life, without a blemish on their fifty years of virtuous living. They may be elected from either virgins or widows, giving always the preference to virgins over widows.

#### XXI. OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COMPANY

*Persons.* To the General Assembly will be summoned all those who take part in the government of the Company, with all the sisters who have been admitted to the Company, whether or not these have ever voted.

*Time.* Ordinarily, this Assembly will be convened when it is time to elect the Mother General, or any one of her Assistants, or Lady Governors. It is the duty of the Mother or her Vicar to convoke all the members to the place at the appointed time.

*Place.*<sup>23</sup> [The place should be the Church of the Company called La Pieta, if this is considered expedient by the Mother General and the Spiritual Director of the Company.] Upon entering the place appointed for the Assembly, each one shall make a brief prayer, recommending to God the negotiations they are about to treat of.

*Convening.* Then each will go to the place appointed for her, according to her office, or according to the length of time she has been admitted into the Company; and this same order should be followed when they go to vote. She who has charge of assembling the Company will see that while they are waiting for all to arrive,

<sup>23</sup> Passage dating from St. Charles' time.



some spiritual book be read to those who are already present. Thus will be avoided the occasion for much talk and other inconveniences.

*Preliminaries.* The one in charge of the meeting shall manage to have the benches arranged so that all can be seated according to rank. Let there be a table on which is a ballot box into which each can cast her written vote through a slit. Before the meeting begins let the Spiritual Director, in the absence of the Bishop, say the prayer for the opening of the Assembly and take his place.

*Adjournment.* In the same way he will close it unless they have some business of great importance, in which case it would be well to recite the hymn *Veni Creator*, and at the close of the meeting in which the Mother General is elected, they should say the *Te Deum* or some other appropriate prayer. If there is no election, some other prayer will do.

*Voting.*<sup>24</sup> Let all bear in mind when meeting for the election of officers, that they ought not, either directly or indirectly, procure that this or that person be elected, or this one or another be rejected; but having recommended the matter to God, let the Holy Spirit breathe as He will, and elect her who is best for the Divine service and the good of the Company. However, it is not forbidden to ask information of some one who can really give it, but be careful, lest blinded by affection, you exaggerate the virtues of one and minimize those of another.

## XXII. OF THE MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BOARD

It is important<sup>25</sup> that the government, upon which depends the well-being of the entire Company, be well organized. For this, five things are to be considered: the persons who take part: the causes for the meeting; the time; the place; and the way in which it should be held.

*Persons.* The persons are: the Spiritual Director, his Substitute, the Mother General, the four Assistants, the eight Lady Governors with their Mistresses and Advisers. \* And if it is necessary to treat

<sup>24</sup> Girelli inserts this passage in her chapter on the Governing Board, p. 43.

<sup>25</sup> Countess Girelli in her chapter on the Governing Board, pp. 42, 43, 44, omits this point and all the rest that are prefaced by an asterisk.

of temporal affairs, the Protectors of the Company should be included. The Substitute can be Chairman.

*Purpose.* The Purpose is: First, \*to decide whether or not to call a General Assembly. Second, \*to elect some officer, as for instance, one of the Advisers, or one of the Protectors. Third,\* to decide about the sisters being received either into the Chapter or into the Company; or, to dismiss some one who has behaved badly in observance of *Rule*. Fourth, to attend to something beneficial for the Company. Fifth, to remedy matters reported in writing by any of the Lady Governors, and for which the Neighborhood Assembly is not able to provide.

*Time.* \*The time for the Assembly shall be: First, some days preceding the day on which sisters are to be received into Chapter or admitted to the Company. Second, some days in advance of the date on which any of the sisters, out of devotion, are to make a Vow of Virginity. Third, every ninth week, following eight weeks in which the Lady Governors hold Neighborhood Assemblies.

*Place.*<sup>26</sup> [The place shall be the Casa di St. Ursula, belonging to the Company, which the Mother General shall see is properly prepared for the meeting].

*Manner.* The manner in which the Assembly is to be conducted is as follows: When cause arises for a meeting, the Mother General having conferred with the Spiritual Director and settled with him upon the date and the hour, shall see that the officers are notified.

\* Then, upon entering, prayer is said, and each one takes her place. The Lady Governors hand in written reports to the Mother General of the needs of their Neighborhood, which are shown likewise to the Spiritual Director. \* So that the interval while they are assembling may not pass idly, the Director will appoint someone to make a spiritual reading, the others listening in silence, unless more than half the members be present; then the proceedings will begin.

*Discussions.* The Director or his Substitute kneeling down with all the Assembly, will give out the prayer at the beginning and end of the meeting, as prescribed above. \* Then he will return to place, and having looked over the matters under consideration, will propose them, one by one, and each in rank will freely give her opinion

<sup>26</sup> This clause dates from St. Charles' time.

on the matters; they will decide according to the opinion of the majority.

In giving her opinion each member will observe two things: first, while she speaks she will stand, unless excused by age or infirmity; and she will not speak again on that special matter without permission. Second, when they decide contrary to her opinion, she will not become excited nor show outward dissatisfaction, but will control herself, and yield to the majority.

*Record.* Everything determined by the Assembly shall be written down by the presiding officer, in a book kept for that purpose, so as to carry the business better into execution, and in order that at the next meeting it may be seen by the governing board whether or not the ordinances of the preceding meeting have been carried out. \* For this end, after the prayer has been said at the beginning of each meeting, the Spiritual Director or his Substitute shall have read aloud the decisions of the preceding meeting, to see if they have been well or badly executed, and if any other remedy is needed.

\* At the close, the Director will say the prayer, give the blessing, and give leave to end the meeting.

#### XXIII. OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSEMBLY

In order that whatever is necessary in each Neighborhood be carried out more systematically in the Assemblies, it is important to take note of those things which should be reported to the governing board.

*Persons.* The persons to take part in the Neighborhood Assembly are the three superintendents of the Neighborhood, namely the Lady Governor, the Mistress and the Adviser; and with these, all the members admitted into the Company or accepted on the register of the Lady Governor or the list of the Adviser. Other than these, no one else may be admitted, unless it be the Spiritual Director or the Mother General, who are free to take part in all the assemblies.

*Object.* The object of the Assembly may be manifold according to need, but ordinarily it is to let everybody know how each and every one carries out the *Rules* and regulations of the Company; and also, to make known and publish anything new that has been ordained by

the government, and to provide for spiritual or corporal needs that have arisen.

*Time.* The ordinary time of the meeting will depend upon the direction given each Governor by the Mother General and the Spiritual Director. Extraordinary meetings will be held whenever the Governor of the Neighborhood deems it expedient, or when urgent business demands. But they will not be held without the Mother and Spiritual Director being first advised.

*Place.* The place will be determined by the Lady Governor according to the convenience of the more distant members, a retired place, and free from outside interruption. It is the Adviser's duty to arrange the room and provide seats, with a special place for the Lady Governor, and the lower place for the Mistress. There should be three rows of benches facing the Lady Governor, for the members: in the first sit those who have been formally received into the Company; in the second, those admitted to Chapter; in the third, the candidates. She will also provide some holy picture, set in a convenient place, before which each member, as she enters, will kneel and say a prayer for the affairs under consideration.

*Preliminaries.* When such an Assembly is to be held, they will observe the following procedure: at least three days beforehand, the Lady Governor, the Mistress and the Adviser, will deliberate upon the needs of the Neighborhood and those things which they propose to carry out in the Assembly, so as to represent the matters better, discuss them, and find suitable remedy. Then they will decide upon a convenient day and hour for the members, and the place for the meeting. It is the business of the Adviser to notify the members in her Neighborhood of time and place, commanding them all in the name of the Lady Governor to be there.

*Assemblies.* Upon entering, each will kneel and say a short prayer before the picture, and saluting each other in the Lord, they will go to their assigned place; and while this is going on, the Mistress will see that someone reads aloud from some devout spiritual book to the members who are seated. When all or the greater number are assembled, the names will be called, one by one, and it will be seen and noted who are absent, and they will say the prayer, and open the meeting.



*Procedure.* First, the Lady Governor will announce the reasons for the meeting. Then she will ask each member how she has gotten along since the last meeting, how she has observed the *Rule*, and carried out the orders of the Assembly. She will demand of the Mistress account of each one, and ask if she has read and explained to each the *Rules* and ordinances; and she will inquire about all things included in the office of Mistress. She will ask the Adviser how each of the members has borne herself in observance of *Rule* and the orders laid down. For the Advisers are they who have special guardianship of the young members. And if it be found that a member has failed in anything, through negligence or contempt, not keeping the *Rules* or the obediences she owes to superiors, the Lady Governor will impose a suitable penance, for the example and edification of others. If there is to be published at this meeting any new thing ordained by the governing board, the Governor will see that it be read and explained in such a way that all will understand it. She will ask them all if they have any difficulty to settle and will see that it is properly attended to, and that the person is satisfied, yielding herself to the decision of her superiors. But if the person appear to be obstinate, this will be noted, and reported to the governing board so that they may decide what to do.

*Spirit of the Meeting.* If, in the Assembly, they have to attend to the spiritual or corporal necessities of any of the young girls, it must be done with the justice and charity that is befitting; and especially, in spiritual things, they should always have an eye to the nature and conditions of the individual, not exasperating her by harsh reproofs, since desperation may make matters worse; nor should they lightly pass over correction with one who has become insolent, and who upsets the order and regulations of the Company. Note likewise that some errors should be corrected by the public example of others, as more useful to those who are in fault. Others still ought to be corrected in secret; again, something done in public may be better helped in private.

*Teaching of Christian Doctrine.* The light of the Holy Spirit and charity will prompt superiors, who as far as is in their power, will procure the honor of God and the salvation of the sisters confided to their care. Then the Lady Governor will recommend to all the ob-

servance of *Rule* and will see that all are exercising themselves in teaching Christian Doctrine, in which each should particularly strive to produce fruit.

*Adjournment.* Then, reciting another prayer, she will dismiss them in the name of God. The day following this meeting, the three superintendents will refer to the Spiritual Director and the Mother General all that was done in the Assembly.

Countess Girelli substitutes for the preceding chapter (Cap. XXIII) one which she entitles "The Assembly of the Sisters." In it she condenses much of the substance of the original. We give it as follows:

The reasons for the Assembly of the Sisters are many, but the following are the principal:

To learn from themselves how they are observing the *Rule*; to provide for their spiritual and temporal needs,<sup>27</sup> and so as to become acquainted and love one another, as devoted sisters, and find opportunity to talk, congratulating and consoling one another, "which will be not the least of the benefits of the meeting."<sup>28</sup>

They will begin some prayer, and while they are assembling the superior will have some spiritual book read. They will read also some point of *Rule*. They will then announce any new matter that is to be established, inquiring if any one has any difficulty to present, giving opportune suggestions for the progress of the Company, or their spiritual advantage.

Then they will say a short prayer, and all depart in silence and recollection. This Assembly will be held twice a month, or at least once.

<sup>27</sup> From Girelli, *op. cit.*, Note 12, p. 58, "It is ordained in the *Rule* that something be provided for the corporal wants of the members, one of the Assistants being appointed to take charge of the finances of the Company. This clearly shows that at the meeting there should be a secret alms-giving in which each can contribute whatever she has to offer for the needs of poor or infirm sisters."

<sup>28</sup> From Girelli, *op. cit.*, Note 13, p. 58: "These words are taken from the Testament of the Saint to show more clearly the utility of the Assembly. (7th, 8th Bequests.) We omit the useless articles about the place."

## XXIV. ON THE PROTECTORS IN TEMPORAL AFFAIRS

As experience shows that many temporal needs may arise in the Company of St. Ursula, which the ladies may not be able to attend to, it is necessary to choose three men, who will promptly assist them in their needs, general and particular.

The Mother General and the ladies of the government may propose to the Bishop the persons they judge suitable; but these must be appointed and confirmed by the Bishop, by whom they can likewise be removed, when he thinks it well for the Company.

XXV. OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COMPANY WITHIN  
THE DIOCESE

God is not a discriminator of persons, but gives His grace to all with free hand, illuminating them with the splendor of His Spirit, that they may know and embrace the means for salvation, or perfection; and often many of those who are deemed noble in the eyes of men, are little and vile in the sight of the Divine Majesty; while those whom men consider mean and base are, at that very time, great and illustrious in the eyes of the Divine Goodness.

It is not surprising that He has given to many devout persons outside of Brescia, in the towns and districts of this diocese, the holy longing to dedicate themselves to the service of God in this Company; and these ought not be denied their desire, so they all shall be admitted, and be made participants of the spiritual goods and merits to be gained in it. These are not less under the paternal and pastoral governance of the Bishop than are those within the city, and they will recognize and reverence as father and superior him who is deputed as Vicar of the Bishop and is Spiritual Director of the Company.

While there must be officers and superiors in the towns like those in the city, it is better for sake of conformity that those of the towns be considered substitutes of those in the city, so that they cannot make any decisions or ordinances, but simply carry out what is laid down by the general government in the city. They will accept

the Mother General as their Mother, with the Assistants and Lady Governors as their superiors,<sup>29</sup> striving to show all reverence and obedience in executing their orders, counsels, and commands.

If they are sometimes outside the jurisdiction of the Spiritual Director's office, or if he is prevented by legitimate occupations, and sends his Substitute to visit them in his place, they shall render the latter all submission, recognizing him as their superior, or Vicar of the Bishop in this Company.

[They may not, at their own choice, select a confessor, but will confess only to the one appointed by the Spiritual Director or his Substitute, for the purpose of greater union and conformity, in serving the Lord, and for the universal welfare of the Company.] <sup>30</sup>

Once a year, about the feast of Pentecost, the superiors, that is, the Substitute, the Lady Governors, Mistresses, and Advisers, or at least several of them, are obliged to go to Brescia to present themselves before the Mother General and Spiritual Director of the Company, to bring about greater union of affection and charity between themselves and those of the city. They can then render account to the superiors of the young girls under their charge, tell of their needs, and receive counsel and aid. It is not, however, intended to obligate those who are very far off, or who are hindered in some other way, and cannot without great inconvenience go to the city. Hence, it is left to the Spiritual Director to dispense from this duty, supplying for it in some other manner.

The Substitute Superiors shall endeavor by whatever means they have at disposal, to have recourse to the superiors in the city regarding the needs of their young girls, as there they may receive assistance and remedy on account of the greater experience.

All rules, customs, and ceremonies, which are observed in the city by the Advisers, Mistresses, and Lady Governors, should be observed, as far as possible, in the other towns.

Let it be understood by the Substitute Mothers in the towns, and their Spiritual Directors appointed by the Spiritual Director of the

<sup>29</sup> This plan was easily carried out on account of the peculiar way in which each Quadra of the city of Brescia held jurisdiction over its own neighboring country, district and communes. See Chap. XII.

<sup>30</sup> This article dates from St. Charles' time.



Company, that they may not accept nor admit any young girl into the Company without permission.

The same form of election will be carried out for the towns as for the city; and they shall not hold elections without knowledge and leave of the Spiritual Director of the Company.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE OLD WAY AND THE NEW LIFE

#### I

“L'ANTICA strada e vita nuova,” is the phrase which seems best to express Angela's idea: “the old road and the new life.”

Old roads and old rivers have a wisdom of their own, and wise is the man who respects it; but with the great gift which we call life, the glorious thing is that it is forever new. Angela's words bear a peculiar appeal, the appeal of our immortal human eagerness, the eternal “On! On!” of the spirit that is within us. With the susceptibility of youth to what is fresh and new, the young women of her clientèle must have responded quickly; it is not difficult to conceive how a novel plan like hers, especially with its inspiration towards the higher, more spiritual, more generous life, took hold upon the Brescian girls, especially at such a moment.

The plan which she proposed for carrying out this new life was set down in her *Rule*. Says Madame Girelli:

“Now, let us open this book of the *Rule*, small in size but immense in doctrine and fruit. The *Rule* dictated by Angela is divided into two parts, ten chapters to each part. In the first are found all the counsels that enable the sisters to live holily in their state; in the second are the organization and the duties of the officers of this spiritual family.

“The style is simple, clear, and concise. At first sight, the book might seem of small importance, but what the most enlightened ascetics have written on obedience, poverty, mortification, is found here condensed, their doctrine set down in a single line.

“For every doubt and difficulty in the life of a sister there is the right answer, the proper word, found in this *Rule*. The prescriptions fit the most varied circumstances of home life, without changing in the least that order on which depends the well-being of society. The

practices given in this *Rule* are marvellously adapted to young girls of every class and condition.”<sup>1</sup>

And certainly, nothing could be more sensible than the way in which Donna Merici set about building up her institute. Knowing it to be a novelty, she moved slowly, sifting her material. First, she gained the confidence of the matrons of Brescia; then she gathered together eight of the most illustrious and devout; next she singled out one strong firm character to be her own successor, and a second to assist this one, by which means she provided against that disintegrating process which naturally sets in after the impelling hand is withdrawn from any human undertaking. She considered the work which lay before her and tried to establish it on such a solid foundation that it might not be shaken or overturned by any difficulty or opposition. With this in mind, she provided for all legal emergency, civil and ecclesiastical. The Company's affairs were to be duly regulated with respect to parish requirements,<sup>2</sup> the organization being so nicely adjusted, that while it involved the entire city, even the entire diocese, in its scope, the parish was its actual field. Each member was to centre her spiritual life in her parish church, communicating at the Ursuline Oratory only on the first Friday of the month.

Angela could scarcely have expressed herself more emphatically. She knew that the Church had always possessed for the benefit of the needy, a two-fold remedial activity, an institutional element and a parochial element, each complete in itself and of spontaneous growth, nor had it ever lost sight of one for the other. The need of social service in the parish had brought out, here and there, in cities and towns, small groups of charitable workers, women and men, who had exerted an energetic influence and had passed the tradition along to other groups, without much tendency towards anything like organization, — unless by exception, — beyond a certain parish limit and parish control. In the transmontane districts of Germany and France, parish life early became more defined than in Italy, but nowhere better than in the vicinity of Rome could we look to find a

<sup>1</sup> Girelli, *Esposizione Pratica della Regola di S. A. Merici*, Brescia, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> *Rule*, Chaps. VII, VIII.

traditional consciousness of this double life within the shadow of the Church.<sup>3</sup>

To what extent it played a part in Angela's thoughts and motives, it were hard to say. The old biographers speak of her interest in the Christian Fathers and it is to the reading of Scripture that they ascribe the general moulding of her religious thought, which might, in a limited measure, account for her leaning towards the social-service phase of human need, the parochial rather than the institutional trend of the Church's activities. Be that as it may, she was wise in accepting the ecclesiastical outlines of Brescian society, just as she accepted the already existing municipal outlines for her own upbuilding. She thus set up her edifice on double foundations that had long been tried out.

One cannot but admire the wisdom she displayed in utilizing the municipal plan of the city of Brescia. A little research reveals, in the report of Paolo Correr, Podesta sent to Venice some years later that

"the city is divided into four Quarters, one larger than the others: San Faustino, San Alessandro, San Giovanni, the Cittadella; and each of these into other Quarters: San Faustino into six; San Giovanni into seven; San Alessandro into two; and the Cittadella into two others called the Old Cittadella and the New."<sup>4</sup>

Angela was quick to see how she might divide the city for her own purpose into eight similar sections, which she called Neighborhoods or Quadra; and as each Quarter of the town possessed a certain measure of local self-government, she, too, adopted that idea. Again, to each division of the city corresponded its neighboring country district, including communes or towns, the economic significance of which has already been pointed out; and Angela and all Brescians were accustomed to the political subjection of country-Quadra to town-Quadra, which was formally acknowledged every year at the Festival of the Assumption, on August the fifteenth.

It was with this traditional view of territory and diocese in mind, that she dictated the final chapter of her *Rule*, providing regulations

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Charlemagne's idea; and that of the Béguines and others.

<sup>4</sup> Zanelli, *Devozione di B.*, *op. cit.*



for the members of the Company of St. Ursula who lived within the diocese but outside the city of Brescia. She echoed the old city legislation again in ordaining that, once a year, the officers in the communes should go to Brescia and present themselves before the Mother General and the Spiritual Director, with their report; this was done in order to bring about a stronger bond of affection between those of the country and those of the city.<sup>5</sup>

Angela said to the matrons of Brescia: Come, let us make of the city a double X; let us set over each of these Quadras or Neighborhoods a Lady Governor, a woman of some experience, about thirty years of age, with an older woman as Adviser, and a younger one as Mistress to teach the young members their duties.

At the centre of the Company let there be a Mother-General, a woman of at least forty years, whose term is for life, and to whom all matters must be referred, without, however, her interfering in the special field of the Neighborhood activities. She is to have four Assistants, one of whom will act as her Vicar, without power of initiative, and another of whom is to be the treasurer if the Mother-General cannot fulfil that office. These five will meet once a week to provide for current necessities; they will receive reports from the Neighborhoods, and elect the eight Advisers, who, being visitants, must be carefully chosen. And these same five, with the three Neighborhood officers, shall constitute the governing board of the Company of St. Ursula.

All terms expire with that of the Mother-General, and the new higher officers are to be chosen from among those women who have had experience in the lower offices.

The governing board alone is to control the Company's funds while all the activities and works of the association shall be under the direction of the Lady Governors.

The *Rule* or constitution which Angela conceived binds the Company together in mutual support by an interesting chain of conferences. Each Mistress interviews the members under her, and instructs them, while every fifteen days the three Neighborhood officers confer together about these same members, their needs and activities. Then the Neighborhood Assembly is convoked by the

<sup>5</sup> *Rule*, Chap. XXV, Sal., 197, Girelli, 49, *Regola*.

local Lady Governor at a time appointed by the Mother-General, unless it be under pressure of emergency. Report of this meeting is sent in by the local officers to the Mother-General, the Spiritual Director, and the Assistants. And finally, a General Assembly of all enrolled members is convened for elections. If a subordinate officer die, the governing board supplies her place, all elections being confirmed by the bishop.

In the larger functions of the Company, Angela called for women of mature years and judgment, while on the outskirts, as it were, in the lower places, those in touch with the young, she placed young sisters; for instance, the Mistresses or teachers were young. She realized the infectious qualities of youth, sympathy, and enthusiasm.

There was no pledge required to bind a member to the Company, other than her formal desire to remain and her continued fidelity to its statutes. The rule of obedience was sufficiently explicit to make her obligations clear. If she were disobedient, Angela directed that she was to be given a chance to redeem herself; if in this, too, she failed, she was to be expelled. That such a thing happened is evident, from the fact that Saint Charles Borromeo put up placards in the public piazza, threatening excommunication upon anybody usurping the insignia of the Company, presumably ex-members.

## II

In harmony with the way in which she selected her women, she utilized, also, the support of the men of Brescia.

Two canonists were chosen as Spiritual Directors in the Company so that the members might thoroughly understand their obligations, their rights, and privileges, in view of what the Church expected of them; at a time when false principles were leading people away, it was necessary to have a reliable guidance.

For the temporal needs of the Company, matters which might possibly surpass the powers of these good women, Angela thought it well to have at command a committee of three experienced citizens of Brescia, to whom the ladies could have recourse. With the same wise care, she directed that a Notary was to be present to authenticate the first general elections, and that the minutes of all meetings

of the governing board were to be recorded in a book kept for the purpose, and read at the beginning of each successive meeting. She drew attention in the eighteenth chapter of her *Rule* to the civic duties of her women, who were to prove themselves good citizens and "obey all the laws and statutes." In her eyes, they did not cease, in consecrating themselves, to be still responsible members of society, and she meant them to be a definite unit in the civic body-corporate with a positive influence. Once more, one marvels at the soundness of judgment and breadth that here are displayed in a woman attenuated by long fasts, a woman who would be relegated today, perhaps, to the class of chronic anaemics.

Thus, her practical sense led her to employ every human means within reach, and to make use of every human instrument; this being done, her institute was to go on, trusting to Divine Providence!

And yet, although she provided every sort of outside counsel, she emphatically enjoined upon them to keep to themselves their financial affairs; she did not propose to have her Company exploited for what it was worth by every demand of the passing hour. Their finances were for the temporal necessities of the Company alone and for its needy members. The Foundress wrote:

"Be assured — that if it had not been a useful and proper thing for the Company to have some income, God would not have begun to provide for it as He has done. This money which you have, use it for the good of the Company; I do not wish you to seek counsel in this matter outside the Company. Do simply what charity and the Holy Spirit prompts for the welfare of your daughters."<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Ludwig Pastor is mistaken in thinking that education was not the kernel of Angela's institute; in thinking that, established as a form of localized social service in a general sense, it gradually became, long after her death, an educational institute.<sup>7</sup> Nor are those correct, who affirm that it will be found difficult to trace the original relationship between the Ursulines of Paris and the Brescian Company of St. Ursula, to concede to the Ursulines, cloistered and grilled, a lineal descent from Angela Merici. Nor are those at all

<sup>6</sup> *Counsels*.

<sup>7</sup> Weltzer and Welte, *Kirchenlexikon*, s. v. Ursuline, 1901, Vol. XII, Feiburg im B.

in the right, who deny that she was indeed the glorious Foundress of a progeny apparently so unlike the mother.

For the educational idea of Angela Merici is clearly indicated in her *Primitive Rule*. There is no work other than this specified for the Governors to insist upon:

"The Lady Governors will see that all are exercising themselves in teaching Christian Doctrine."<sup>8</sup>

And this Rule makes the duty obligatory upon all members. In Chapter XIX she says again that no one is exempt; all are to do charitable work, especially the work of Christian instruction; here, the charitable work is vague, unspecified, but the educational work is positively and explicitly exacted: Christian instruction.

"All members, according to the judgment of their confessors, must carry on some charitable work, *especially the work of Christian instruction.*"

Note that she makes it incumbent upon them to look to results; they may not stop with instruction; there must be follow-up work, each member must produce fruit in conduct, according to the best sense of modern pedagogy. For the relation between conduct and education as applied to Angela's work is expressed in her injunction, "They must teach and inspire good conduct; as well as doctrine."<sup>9</sup>

To grasp just what she meant several things must be recalled that have already presented themselves in the evolution of her idea. It will be remembered that long experience and reflection had shown her that what the society of her day needed was not indeed intellectual pabulum, the content supplied in the curricula of the Humanistic schools; but the element which, on the contrary, they were failing to supply, if not actually counteracting, — the principles of right living, and these taught correctly to the young on the foundation of the Christian religion, as the only reasonable basis for morality. To Angela's mind, as has been seen, this was the immediate and imperative need in a fast paganizing society. Angela thought, let the young be thoroughly impregnated with this information and this energizing principle, then the new sciences, the new learning, could fit into their own proper places in the general scheme

<sup>8</sup> Salvatori, p. 192.

<sup>9</sup> Salvatori, p. 186; Girelli, §§ 39, 40.



of education. Secondly, it must be remembered that she foresaw and anticipated change. She legislated with this in mind. Both in her writings and in the early traditions of her Company is writ large her conviction that new developments in society demand new adjustments and her educational plan was to be ready to adapt itself.

Lastly, we recall how she realized that her institute was being precipitated into a state of society that needed now and on the spot a remedial help and that only by supplying this remedy would it be able to resolve itself into an educational agency, especially a religious one. Note how she expresses herself: "Do some charitable work, especially Christian instruction."

Further still, the reason why she stressed the point that her teachers were to *be* the thing they taught was because the content of their instruction was ethics as well as dogma. Their whole system would fail if this failed.

The divisions and ramifications of Christian Doctrine for the practical work of teaching had for ages been recognized, dogma, moral, discipline, liturgy, and the like; these do not change; it has been the work of the centuries succeeding Angela to interpret her wishes and change the work of her institute to suit the times; <sup>10</sup> but always, Christian Doctrine and its ethics is the right moral centre from which in the present day her daughters teach the circle of the modern curricula, and thus, Angela's Teaching Idea is completely fulfilled.

Characteristically, she found in the field immediately at hand the tools for the work she had designed. For Angela's young girls began by teaching at the hospitals, according to the customs of the times, a programme quite inconceivable today. "All the hospitals," wrote Father Landini a few years later, "all the hospitals of Brescia make use of the Company of St. Ursula."

In the mediaeval hospitals, which, like the Guilds, were of ecclesiastical foundation, and directed by clerics under the protection and responsibility of the municipality, every sort of need of unfortunate humanity was provided for; an institution which, in its beginning, was an offspring of that early dispensary, where, in the primitive Christian Church, the people's offerings at Mass time, of bread, wine

<sup>10</sup> See Chap. IX, *infra*.

and general provisions, were stored and doled out to the poor by deacons and deaconesses.<sup>11</sup>

Twenty years after Angela's death, Paolo Correr reported six hospitals in Brescia. The Hospital Grande, endowed, he said, employed teachers, *Maestri di Lettere et di Arti* "for their orphans, who at the hospital were taught according to their bent, up to the age of sixteen." In *Misericordia*, endowed likewise, were maintained orphans of the poor, one hundred in number, between the ages of six and twelve; these were taught oratory, letters or arts, according to their aptitude, while priests, teachers, and domestics were engaged for their care at the expense of the *Misericordia*.<sup>12</sup>

It was in these institutions and among such poor that Angela's young girls may be conceived as making their first assay, hired by the hospitals, or giving service gratis. Then, as the rich were usually provided for in convents or by tutors, the young Ursulines began to gather the poor of the Neighborhood into their own homes to give them Christian instruction. Her mention of good conduct, good example, shows that while she limited her legislation to Christian Doctrine, she expected her teachers to give the little ones whatsoever else was befitting their sex, and this interpretation of her mind is borne out by traditions of her Order. No doubt, the teachers employed by the hospitals to instruct in "letters and arts" stopped short of Christian Doctrine, which surmise appears to be strengthened by the lack of ecclesiastical discipline complained of so bitterly in Brescia at the time; moreover, as the new furor laid stress upon classic or profane studies, it is clear that in the new fervor of humanistic education, Angela saw no need to busy herself with studies technically classed as profane, the more so as Christian instruction was the one crying need.

From all which it is evident, that she considered teaching as the specific work of her institute, and the teaching of religion and ideals of conduct as the one particular branch of it which her age demanded. The Company of St. Ursula certainly held Christian Education as its primary object.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Turner, *Cath. Encyc.*, Vol. XIII, p. 556.

<sup>12</sup> Paolo Correr to Venetian Senate in Zanelli, *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, April, 1912.

## III

The relevance of Angela's teaching to education as we know it today has been established in a preceding chapter;<sup>13</sup> there was analyzed at some length exactly what she taught her teachers and how it must inevitably be applied to Pedagogy. Now it were an interesting venture to try to recreate the life of the Company as it appeared to the eyes of the woman whose life's hope was embodied in it; to follow the young Margherita dell 'Olma or the two Peschiera sisters through their daily routine.

On the way home from Mass then, Margherita might not loiter out of curiosity, staying here and there, nor should a true daughter of St. Ursula be seen in the streets, nor chatting at house doors. She must walk quickly and not stand and stare at people and things. In a day when there were no newspapers, such discretion in conduct would soon make its impression, for the merry Brescians loved a good gossip, and, hence, what special need for prudence in Donna Laura or Margherita, who were well known to be assaying a life of virginity right in the heart of the gay world. The Foundress did not approve of their lingering to finish their prayers in the Churches. There was to be no mistake of false piety. "If you have long prayers to say, say them in your room at home," she directs. In fact, her main object was to keep them, with their influence, safe at home. Perhaps there the little sisters and brothers would find joy in sharing their devotions, the very thing she wanted! Is there anything a young child loves better than playing Church? Sweet and hallowed games of innocence! What holy memories they give rise to, like incense, in many a secret heart of worldlings.

Twice in her *Rule* does she forbid her children to loiter in church, for the Italian churches of the sixteenth century, with their betrothals and weddings and their christenings and funerals, their lavish and attractive pomp, were great social gathering places. The vigils of feast days which began in the spirit of a holy austerity at earlier times, had, by the Renaissance, become, only too frequently, mad merry-makings in the church-yard or parish hall, against which

<sup>13</sup> See *infra*, *Angela, Teacher of Teachers*, Chap. VIII.

stern anathemas were being hurled, so it is not surprising if on this subject Angela was one of the warning voices of the age.

The members of the Company of St. Ursula attended no weddings, no balls, no public festivities, although they were still living at home under the jurisdiction of their parents. What if Margherita or Laura or their companions should be twitted about staying at home with wry faces, while their sisters and cousins donned satins and perfumes? What if Mama, a trifle worldly minded, should forget and urge her Ursuline daughter to go, just for a while? "It is impossible," says Madame Girelli, "to lay down an inviolable form for the various circumstances arising when one lives in the world"; and hence, Angela, leaving to the judgment of superiors to decide all cases, established for everyone this wise maxim: "Do what you can, giving good example. It should be your desire and your special care to avoid as much as possible all commerce with society; if with permission of your superiors you fall into danger, you can by Divine aid preserve the spirit of your vocation; and you should appear before the world with the intention of giving good example." The custodian and interpreter of the *Rule* was the Governor of each Neighborhood, and the Foundress left it to her to provide for occasions that might arise. The *Rule* set the limit. If parents or relatives tried to prevent young members from carrying out their *Rule*, this was to be reported to the Lady Governors. For no young girl might enroll in the Company without the entire consent of her parents or guardians; hence these would have no future right to interfere with her duties. Margherita must be very careful in the choice of her friends, for it was a new thing, but lately come into Brescia, this of having next-door-neighbors of a religion different from one's own.

Again and again did the *Rule* warn against taking up with "all sorts of women; loose women who disparage purity, and who love the frivolities of the world and its adulation," chattering of love affairs, of fashions, and fripperies. "Receive no message from man or maid, above all in secret," says the *Rule*; in which adroit line is revealed that Renaissance society of intrigue and amours against which the Company of St. Ursula would, doubtless, have many a battle to wage. Ivani, one of the writers of the day, grumbled about the twofold



stupidity of women who incorrectly "think they please men better by powder, paint and immodest clothes, attracting bold advances of loose men who bother them with intrigue."<sup>14</sup> Margherita and Laura, Simona and Dominica were instructed to converse as little as possible with ladies of fashion and to hold no conversation alone with men, unless unavoidable; for familiarity with youths and men would not lead them to their object in life, which was spirituality.

These solid principles were set down in black and white for the protection of young women whose fond mothers had entrusted them to the care of the ladies of St. Ursula's Company; yet the hand that penned such lines prohibitive, was the same that ruled likewise for Governesses and Mistresses of the society, women of mature judgment, that they should seek special counsel in every difficulty from men of discretion. Angela was prompted not by narrowness but by good common-sense.

Countess Girelli, who was the exponent of Angela's *Rule* in our day, in Brescia, interpreted the viewpoint of the modern girl upon this restriction of the *Rule*. . . . "Hold no conversation alone with men;" "What is a poor girl going to do?" she complains sympathetically, "when there are none in the house with her except men? One must distinguish between talking and conversing," says Mme. Girelli; "discriminate between frivolous, vain conversations with persons of the opposite sex. The sense of the *Rule* is wise and prudent, unless inopportunately applied."<sup>15</sup>

How then was the long day to be spent? Was she to sit meditating and brooding, this dark-eyed Italian girl with the fire of youth shimmering under her lashes, perhaps plying an unambitious needle at a tedious embroidery frame in the sombre chamber of the big old stucco house, or listlessly playing with the water in the courtyard fountain, exchanging saucy speeches with the green parrot on his perch. "Lazy Margherita!" By no means. This girl who must not gossip in the piazza nor gather news at the fruit vendors or market place had her day's program: her household duties, her spiritual reading, her vocal prayers, her weekly Assemblies, perhaps oftener meetings with girl companions "of like mind with herself," at the Mistress' house; her share of the errands of charity which belonged

<sup>14</sup> Rösler, p. 222.

<sup>15</sup> Girelli, *Esposizione della, Regola*.

to her Neighborhood, her visits from her attractive young Mistress who came to confer with her about her charities and her works; and lastly and above all, Margherita, Barbara and Catarina each was the centre of a flock of little girls, the velvet-eyed, curly-headed Italian children, with their restless prattle and noise. She must daily teach and instruct in the way that beseems a Christian Catholic maiden.

Busy then all day long, moving about her household tasks, the young Margherita bethought her of how she had been instructed to deport herself: "quiet and moderate in all things," said the *Rule*. When the neighbors dropped in, she must "be circumspect and prudent in talk. Let your choice of words be wise and proper; be not harsh, not hard, but sweet, and conduce to charity." At the table she remembered the maxim, "Eat and drink, not to pamper the appetite but only to sustain nature." She had her days of fasting, under direction of her confessor, and the Governor who knew and appreciated her family circumstances. "Eat in order to serve God better," said the *Rule*. When merry-makers gathered in the home circle she was to remember "in laughing be proper and moderate — and do not take pleasure in listening to things unless they are right, good and useful."

Margherita had to satisfy at once the demands of family life, the exigencies of social service, and the requirements of a spiritual life that was expected to widen and deepen as the years passed, so the daughter of St. Ursula was anything but idle. The restraints of her *Rule* were like strong silken threads binding her at every angle of daily life, a most subtle austerity. When at last she laid her down to rest at night, she recalled the words of the Madre: "Be moderate even in sleep, sleeping just as much as need demands." And sinking into slumber, this tired young Ursuline remembered how the Madre herself used to labor all day and then manage to spend hours in the night worshipping before the Blessed Sacrament in St. Afra's.

Teaching and praying, these were the supreme duties of her life; they were the very reason of her being an Ursuline. Margherita had a little oratory of her own in her room. Angela taught her to pray all day long: "Sempre pregare colla mente e col cuore:" "with mind and heart always," turning to God, her thoughts, her words, her actions, all her affairs, the interior which was her true life, and



STATUE OF ANGELA MERICI IN THE PIAZZA MERCATO, AT DESENZANO-SUL-LAGO





the exterior, her passing existence. Then there was prescribed the recitation of the Office of Our Lady, and there must be time daily for the Penitential Psalms. If a novice did not know how to recite the Office, she was to be taught by the Neighborhood Mistress; if she could not read she was to substitute Paters and Aves. Thus the idea was to make the home the shrine.

When the little ones of the neighborhood came pouring in, Margherita must have ready for them her Catechism of Christian Doctrine, her hymns, her notes on the Liturgy; she must teach them the principles of Faith and the foundations of morality as embodied in the Commandments of God and of the Church. And not only must the matter be at hand, but all her ingenuity was required to make it attractive and suitable to the little minds. The teaching of Christian Doctrine implies an elaborate program. To follow up these children, every sort of good work was undertaken in each Neighborhood. It was, indeed, settlement-work on a scale of great detail, and where in the history of the world has a happier organization for settlement-work been conceived?

To Brescia this was a distinctly new and educational force. These girls were to be the inspiration of the home and of society. It was a deliberate, overt, and yet subtle influence as Angela conceived it; a distinct propaganda of reaction against un-Christian tendencies. With the teaching of the truth and the acting of what was right, she counted upon creating a solid basis in society, from which all the curricula of all the schools could take root as from a sane and healthy soil. The present business, in her own lifetime, she thought, was to provide the ground. Her successors might and did look to the product that was to be grown upon it. This, then, this preparative stage was what Margherita and Clara and the rest were at work upon.

Each member of the Company of St. Ursula had to attend frequent meetings in her own Neighborhood where all the young women brought their individual problems for adjustment and received either spiritual or material relief and guidance. If objectionable homes had to be visited, she applied to her Lady Counsellor, a woman of fifty to whom such special errands were allotted, and if she needed assistance some one was appointed at the meeting to help

her. Obstacles were investigated. In short, the Neighborhood meeting was the Company's clearing house. Emulation among the eight Neighborhoods must have been one of the vital bonds of unity within the society.

To reassure parents and guardians, the dignified Lady Governor paid visits to the girls' homes in each Neighborhood. She must know where every member lived, know all about her family and her condition and difficulties; she must be specially attentive to anyone suspected of being negligent or careless, or who might be in any danger or sickness or poverty. The Mistress who assisted the Lady Governor was a young woman whose duty it was to go about among the young members of the Company, teaching them how to do their work and how to live up to the spirit and practice of the *Rule*.

In this way, Margherita was guided, cherished and trained by women of experience. She was constantly in the company of girls of her own age. She fell into the democracy of religious equality whatever her class might be. She was kept occupied with matters of intrinsic importance, and which were calculated to develop her very best powers. She had splendid opportunity to attain to the holiness towards which her youthful aspirations had directed her from the beginning; and even from a purely natural standpoint she had a life, which, for each of its retrenchments, could provide an enrichment to mind and character far beyond anything to which society, so called, can bestow.

Such is the rough outline of daily existence as it must have appeared to the first members of Angela's Company.

#### IV

If, then, we are to estimate the importance of her work as designed for Christian instruction, let us begin by recalling her immediate and contemporaneous object. She realized the false conceptions that were misleading the young people around her, but in her *Rule* she did not employ the word heresy: <sup>16</sup> she used its oppo-

<sup>16</sup> It was during the Middle Ages, so Joly claims, that the word heretic gradually took on the opprobrious sense which it now conveys. Originally, it did not always mean error; for instance, the philosophers gave the name of Christian Heresy to the religion of Jesus Christ Himself, because the meaning of the Greek, *airesis*, meant simply, I

site, — “good doctrine,” — for it was this that occupied her attention. In a sense, her institute may be said to have been established for this special purpose, the counteracting of error, by the inculcating of truth, — a military Company of St. Ursula, with its General, its Governors, and its Advisers, in Italian, “Colonelli,” whose campaign was outlined in her *Rule*.

Historians seem so to have interpreted her. Cesare Cantù in his discussion of the reform in the sixteenth century,<sup>17</sup> tells how Angela Merici founded a Company “putting it under the patronage of St. Ursula, without austere rule, nor contemplation, nor any other of the monastic requirements against which the heretics were at that time declaiming. . . . The daughters of St. Ursula declared ‘It is necessary to renew the corrupt world by means of the young people: children will reform the families, families the provinces, the provinces, the world!’”

Comparing the foundation of Angela’s work with that of Ignatius Loyola, Salvatori notes that both fix their attention upon preparing youth “against the torrent of vices and errors which through Calvin and Luther were then infecting the Church.”<sup>18</sup> He assumes that Angela made her visit to Rome in 1525 solely on account of the attacks against the authority of the Holy See, and the obloquy into which the new Humanistic teachers were striving to sink the custom of venerating relics, so many of which were preserved in Rome.

And certainly, the work which Angela did in the sixteenth century against erratic teachings has never been forgotten by the Popes. Pius IX, in 1861, raising her feast day, May 31st, to a universal celebration in the Church, spoke of her as a lily among thorns, instituting a Company of young girls whom she longed<sup>19</sup> to preserve from the “fast spreading, seductive errors of Luther and Calvin.”

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adhere to, I choose — ; it signified a choice, a party, a sect, good or bad. But by Angela’s day the air was so full of a thousand forms of religious error taken up by Catholic people, which is a fundamental condition of heresy properly so-called, that there was no other way of designating these heterodox principles except to class them all in one group, and call them an anti-Catholic party, or Heresy. cf. Bergier, *Dict. of Theology*; also Joly, *Psychology of the Saints*.

<sup>17</sup> Cesare Cantù: *Gli eretici d’Italia: Discorso XXI, La riforma morale e disciplinare*, Vol. II, p. 299.

<sup>18</sup> Salvatori: *Vita della Santa Madre*, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Pius IX, *Decree Urbis et Orbis*, July 11, 1861.

He pointed out how "she drew from her institute the richest fruits for the well-being of the Church and society." And it was because he perceived in the modern world "a spirit singularly inflamed with hatred against Christian society, and efforts to corrupt the morals of women, especially the young," that Pius IX sought at that moment to draw the attention of the entire Church to Angela's remedial work.

The late Benedict XV, in his letter to the Ursulines on the Tercentenary of the Order, spoke in the same tenor regarding Angela's far-reaching influence:

"We have every confidence that the Divine Goodness will bring out of this immense ruin (the World War) an order of things all new, in which the principles of justice and Christian charity will prevail. All good people, each in his own way, should coöperate in this restoration.

"For your part (you Ursulines), recalling what your institute has done heretofore, do you apply yourselves still more ardently to your task, in forming the minds and hearts of young girls, so as to make them one day mothers of families that are truly worthy of their Christian profession."<sup>20</sup>

## V

If there is any marked characteristic in the construction of Angela's *Rule*, it is its order, its articulation and harmony. She has everything moving with both nicety and flexibility around a certain fixed centre. Thus, by a fine training under guidance of these regulations, did she constitute her little institute as a bulwark for the important ethical principle of authority.

She made her little Company be the thing which she wished to teach and inspire in others.

She held fast with Christ to the self-evident truth couched in the words "Can the blind lead the blind? Do they not both fall into the ditch?"<sup>21</sup> She recognized that Christ had provided a directive head for His people,—He, the Divine Educator,—through revealed truths and the ministry of His Church. "Thou art Peter, and upon

<sup>20</sup> *Letter of Benedict XV*, Dec. 27, 1917.

<sup>21</sup> *Luke VI*, 39.



this rock <sup>22</sup> I will build my Church," were words forever echoing in Angela's ears.

She had appealed to her Company <sup>23</sup> to pray for the reform of the Church, that reform which successive Councils in three or four successive centuries had striven in vain to effect. Angela had actually organized her women, indirectly to help in that reform. She was quite familiar with the decay of morals within the sanctuary; again and again did she warn them about it. She knew on the other hand the prevalent fashion of bitter tongues to exaggerate the state of affairs as a cloak for general indecency, and that the too-widespread hatred of priests and the well-known mob-instinct to lay any horror to the charge of those in high places, <sup>24</sup> had not improved the condition of things.

Still, she believed that the gates of Hell would not prevail. No ideal could be impeached because of failure in the individual. With the rest of the Brescians, for instance, she was well aware that Podesta government had been adopted with eyes open to the fact that every Podesta was not a hero. Angela recognized in the Church, despite its human element, regardless of the crass finiteness of its instruments, the fostering and directing of humanity, through means and agencies divinely ordained, re-forming the human soul to the life of God, and guiding the human-being <sup>25</sup> from the cradle to the grave.

Again, she herself stood always for authority. In the first place, she had begun her Company only when sure that she could move in accord with a guidance higher than herself; that is to say, when her Spiritual Director pronounced the fiat upon her conscience. In the normal way with such matters, she proceeded then to obtain the approval of the highest diocesan functionary, Cardinal Cornaro, Bishop of the city, nor did she rest until the Company of St. Ursula had sought the final sanction of the centre of authority in Rome.

Within the society, for the sake of spiritual security, she established the guardianship of two ecclesiastics. Moreover, in the institute itself she laid great stress upon direction, for she realized that the main support of education is the harmonious relation be-

<sup>22</sup> Matt. XVI, 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Counsels.*

<sup>24</sup> Burckhardt, *History of the Renaissance in Italy*, Vol. I, p. 225.

<sup>25</sup> Harbrecht, *Fundamental Educational Notions*, p. 49.

tween authority and obedience. Here the injunctions were very explicit: each member of the Company was to obey her domestic superiors in the family at home: obey the officers of the state: obey the Commandments of God and the Six Commandments of the Church: obey her confessor, as well as the ecclesiastical director of the Company; obey the bishop of the diocese: and lastly she was to take great care to follow the inspirations of the Holy Spirit within her own soul! Where can be shown a more detailed program? <sup>26</sup>

The subserving of the will to the directive guidance of authority, Angela appreciated, as do all ascetics, as the means of securing greater spiritual power for the individual who is guided. The Humanism of her day was claiming, as a right of genius, the privilege of every moral freedom and laxity: even if it were to be granted that her point of view was extreme, exaggerated, why, in order to obtain the special spiritual goods which she desired, should she not be allowed the privilege of the freedom to bind herself? "If I lose myself, I find myself," said Galahad. The age of the Renaissance, in its exaggerated cult of the ego, had overlooked the fact that man's greatest problem lies in his own nature, and that all questions of freedom bring him back to the starting point of his own self-mastery. He broke from the moorings of authority and thus lost that inner security with which neither society nor state has any right to interfere. It was true, as the women of Brescia and Angela reasoned, that great forces had been set at liberty, but there had been no provision made for that leadership of the spirit whose necessity had been long ago recognized, even by the oldest Oriental peoples.

With the ingenuousness of her race and her era she took up her modest banner championing authority, and marshalled her girls through the streets of Brescia like a spiritual militia. Well she understood, how with the principle of authority eliminated, all moral convictions in the minds of the masses were bound eventually to break down. Would she have been surprised could she have foreseen for how many centuries the force of mere tradition could actually hold the people, like a camouflage, over the slow but enormous disintegration? Angela's was a war for truth in the best sense and method, a war for the highest standards of Christian Humanism.

<sup>26</sup> *Rule of St. Angela Merici*, Chap. VIII.

## VI

But the point which Angela had at heart most of all in her institute, that which was the apple of her eye, the very marrow of her project, was the ideal of asceticism which the wave of new thought was dragging in the mire.

"Down with celibacy! Down with the cloister! It is a hideous protuberation upon the surface of society!" Such was the cry. Even the Platonism bandied from mouth to mouth by Catholic ladies of the highest circles covered an implied demand for the tearing down of restrictions.<sup>27</sup>

In this instance, Angela Merici sprang upon the last redoubt: rallying her sex, she caught up the torn shreds of the colors and once more waved it in the sunlight. "Virginity a crime against nature? They shall see! We will go further still: we will prove that a cloistered virginity is possible, by displaying to the people of Brescia an uncloistered virginity. We will prove the spiritual strength of womanhood, by sending tender maidens out into the streets with nothing to protect them but their woman's will and the grace of God. We will show that the ascetic ideal in the homes of Brescia is the salvation of its society: <sup>28</sup> that all virtue is possible only because of this very asceticism." Such was the thesis that was written in the structure of the Company of St. Ursula.

In order to enter the Company of St. Ursula, as the *Rule* ordained, in its opening words, "one must absolutely be a virgin."

"Our *Rule* does not constrain anyone to make a Vow of Virginity," thus reads the chapter on Virginity: "it demands only the firm resolution to give to God this treasure which makes us sisters to the angels."<sup>29</sup>

The members then, must be resolved to practice a life of celibacy. The *Rule* expressly forbade them to assume any engagements with

<sup>27</sup> Valla attacked virginity as a crime against the race. Beccadelli and Poggio apotheosized vice.

<sup>28</sup> Girelli voices the same idea. See § 36. "While the proud innovator rose up against Christianity and gained proselytes by preaching a doctrine that gave sway to the passions Angela was establishing out in the world an apostolate of morals: she raised aloft the standard of holy virginity which was being reviled by heretics of the time."

<sup>29</sup> *Rule*, Chap. IX, of Virginity.

men. They were not bound by any vow not to marry, but were encouraged to make such a vow of their own free will and private desire, although the vow was not permitted in the Company before the age of forty, and then only with permission of their confessor and the superiors of the Company.

If any of the sisters wished out of devotion to take a Vow of Virginity,<sup>30</sup> the *Rule* lent a singular solemnity to the occasion, by ordering that the fact was to be formally announced at the Officers' meeting convoked especially for that purpose. And once more did the Foundress show her mind, when she directed that in electing the Mother General, "they should, in case of choice, prefer an unmarried woman to a widow because the state of virginity is higher, and more like that of the sisters to be governed."<sup>31</sup> Angela's *Rule* seems to imply in this matter, a thorough understanding of the mind of the Church, in its actual legislation, as well as in its tendencies and currents of thought. Either it was the provision of her sanctity, or mature counsel and discussion in Rome or elsewhere with high ecclesiastics, her usual way — or perhaps with the help of both — but she seems to have realized the shifting conditions of things monastic, at that time, and to have built for a future that was uncertain, by preparing a soil ready for any growth. It was a great mind that was willing to clothe so great a thought in so small and apparently insignificant a garb and compass, in order to insure its real achievement long after she herself should have passed away. It was in this that her genius broke through the traditional character

<sup>30</sup> *Rule, op. cit.*, Chap. XIV.

<sup>31</sup> Girelli, *Regola of 1903*, pp. 116, 117: "The most ancient formula of the Vow which has come down to us is that approved by St. Charles, as follows: 'In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I . . . NN. . . . unworthy servant of Jesus Christ Our Lord, for the honor and glory of His Divine Majesty and the praise of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, of our glorious protectress, St. Angela Merici, and of the virgin and martyr, St. Ursula, and of all the saints of Paradise, do vow and promise the Omnipotent God, the holy Virgin and all the saints of Heaven, in your presence, Reverend Father, and in that of all the Company, never to choose any other spouse, but to observe perpetual chastity and purity of mind and body.

"And in sign of this promise, I shall always wear this crucifix, and I propose to live in retirement and mortification, both internal and external, and in obedience to my superiors, praying the Divine Majesty, through the merits of Mary most holy, of our glorious St. Angela, and of all our other holy advocates and protectors, to deign to accept this, my fervent vow, and grant me the grace to perfect myself in its observance until death. Amen.'"



of her sex, and sacrificed — man-like — a present good for a larger future benefit.

Years before, in the Vision of Brudazzo, Angela had foreseen a sphere for uncloistered women like unto that of the angels, and now, in this *Rule*, she embodied her ideal of a free virginity. More than once since her time has her conception been voiced and it has come borne from strange fields, remote indeed from hers. In the modern world of woman's endeavor, people, and these very far from holding religious views in common with Angela Merici, have been for some time calling attention to the indisputable fact that Protestantism, with its objection on principle to the ascetic ideal of life, holds an isolated position among the world religions: "It will have to alter its position, or perish. . . . Schopenhauer says: 'Luther maintained the impossibility of a chaste life outside of matrimony. Wait, that which thou hast said, that will break thy neck!' . . . Marital fidelity is not in the least natural: it is already an extraordinary conquest of nature. How justify fidelity at all, if natural impulses are so unconquerable that celibacy is pronounced folly, and sin against nature? . . . If the compulsion of nature be so urgent, how can one demand continence before marriage? How, chaste life, in the unmarried, or in marriages where husband or wife is the victim of illness? . . . It seems to be quite forgotten that a class of persons who are not married, owing to natural causes, will always exist."<sup>32</sup> "It is important to society," goes on our author, "that this shall not be regarded as a frustrated form of existence. . . . For this reason alone, consistent monogamy stands or falls with the esteem in which celibacy is held."<sup>33</sup>

Benedict XV, in his congratulatory letter to the Ursulines, deplores the way in which the modern woman yields herself without restraint to interests foreign to her sex, deserting the domestic duties for which she is adapted. From the inheritors of the Mother-idea of Angela Merici, the Ursulines, he knew he would meet with sympathy: "This general disturbance, you Ursulines have resisted as much as has been in your power, striving to maintain Christian

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Mme. Girelli's views.

<sup>33</sup> Foerster, *Marriage and the Sex Problem*, Chap. IX, *The Indispensability of the Ascetic Ideal*, 1909, circ.

womanhood in the young girls confided to your care. . . . Great is the work that you have accomplished. . . .”

He drew attention to the stress of the age in alienating woman from the maternal care and guidance of the Church, reminding these teachers of the astonishing part which woman can play in the destiny of the race: “If she depart from her normal path, all discipline, domestic or civil, is destroyed. Women bred without religion abandon all order whatsoever.”<sup>84</sup>

Martyrdom, as Madame Girelli wisely said, is not always accompanied by bloodshed. Time has brought about a different sort of persecution against the highest ideals of womanhood, for the world has made virginity the butt of derision, raillery, and contradiction. The sword, the rack have been superseded by flattery, softness, snares, scandal. But even here Angela’s warning holds: “Keep to the old ways and usages of the Church; and live a new life! . . . l’antica strada . . . e vita nuova.”

## VII

Apart from the abstract principles which her scheme embodied, the ascetic ideal, and the fundamental basis of authority, the point in which she personally took most interest was, that whatever system they might fix upon, it should embody the Mother-idea. Through the pages of her Last Will and Testament she had striven to instill this in her teachers, and the fact that the *Rule* which exists today among the large majority of Ursulines is stamped with this special characteristic is due to the success with which she managed to impress her first daughters. Let us see how this reveals itself.

On the threshold of the succeeding century, when her institute was about to take its tremendous step towards monastic life in Paris, it was desired to find some person who might be considered to be a living commentary upon the spirit and primitive *Rule* of the Foundress, and such a person was discovered in Frances de Bermond, the first Ursuline in southern France. In 1596, Frances had established the first community there, in Provence, whence these sisters always looked to Frances as to a second Angela. She had practised

<sup>84</sup> Benedict XV, Letter, Dec. 27, 1917.

the primitive *Rule* for fourteen years. A woman she was, truly distinguished, and like Angela in zeal for following out new paths in the salvation of souls, as well as in her tender love of Christ crucified. Tradition lingers over her attractive ways, the simple lines of her life, her spirit of unbroken prayer. It is told that she always journeyed on an ass, and that the people loved to meet her along the country roads.

Frances de Bermond is considered to have been the author of what is regarded as the first pedagogical supplement to the *Rule* of Angela, for Angela's manuscript did not provide her daughters detailed descriptions as to how an Ursuline should comply with the task of training youth. To be sure, in how far Frances herself created this supplement, in how far it was handed down from the Provence sisters, or to what extent if at all, it was blended with the pedagogical maxims of P. Romillon, under whose direction the Provencal daughters of Angela were teaching, could be learned only by examining critically the first *Rule* printed in Provence. But Frances expressed her understanding of Ursuline vocation and Ursuline duties as the reflex of Angela's mind in the first *Constitution of Paris*, which was drawn up before 1610, and which comprised the following chapters:

- Chap. I. Of the perfection and great union with God to which Ursulines should aspire in order to fulfil their vocation.
- Chap. II. Some considerations which the Ursulines should keep in mind in order to bear with joy the labor of instructing.
- Chap. III. How they ought to teach.
- Chap. IV. What they should teach their pupils.

The substance of these chapters, the earliest program laid down for the educational work of an Ursuline in following out the genius and family spirit of the Company of St. Ursula, runs somewhat as follows:

Their principal aim being to instruct little girls in Christian Doctrine and conduct suited to their sex, Ursulines should study to acquire great perfection, and try to reach a high degree of prayer and union with God: for if, by their fault, the children are not well instructed, God will demand a severe account of them. They must

be convinced that these entrusted souls are destined for God and eternal life.

The apostolic vocation is then explained: <sup>35</sup> "Just as coal that is scarcely warm will not inflame another coal like one that is on fire, so people who are but little afire with the love of God will but rarely, and with great difficulty, inspire others with that love. But certainly, those full of the perfect gifts emanating from the Father of Lights, contemplating His greatness, all transformed themselves from light to light as by the Spirit of God, aid their neighbor wonderfully by their efficacious words, springing from an enlightened heart burning with love of God."<sup>35</sup>

It is significant that Mlle. de Bermond directs the life in the Ursuline Boarding Schools to be made similar to family life as much as possible. The nuns shall fulfil their charge *like true and loving mothers*, caring tenderly for the bodies, and nurturing the hearts and souls of the children confided to them. Here is seen how Frances imbibed the great idea, the Mother-idea of Angela, and passed it on to future generations:

Frances de Bermond  
1610.

"And as with young girls, some are corrected by fear, others by kindness, these by the rod, those by sweet persuasion, certain ones by silence, others by attending to them individually, the teachers in each class shall try to notice the nature and inclinations of their pupils and their capacity, so as to lead them and to deal with them prudently and with discretion." (Chap. IV.)

Angela Merici  
1534.

"Have each and every one of them individually deeply embedded in your heart and soul, not merely their names but their present conditions, their dispositions, in fact, their whole being, which will not be a difficult task. Is this not evident in natural mothers?"

Charity will teach discernment and discretion, will judge when to be indulgent, when severe." (2nd Counsel.)

From this, Frances proceeds as follows:

"They must have command of themselves; be watchful to repress their own passions and any feeling that might affect the correction, taking care not to let themselves give way to anger.

"Never, through impatience or otherwise, must they strike the children or abuse them. If they must be chastised, this must be

<sup>35</sup> Chap. II, *Constitutions of Paris*.



done only by order of the Superior or the Mistress General of the classes." (Chap. IV.)

The greater part of the time, as Frances stipulates, is to be devoted to teaching the ordinary branches, reading, writing, sewing and "all proper studies, suitable to their sex and age." Nevertheless, the Ursulines must remember that Christian Doctrine and Good Conduct are the principal things they are to teach. At this point she adheres verbally to Angela's *Rule*. "Keep to the text of the Catechism," she says, "without discussion and needless researches, accustoming the children to treat the things of God with due reverence. But when it is necessary to tell anything in order to make the Catechism better understood, let it be done with prudence and wisdom, without running the risk of saying anything that is beyond their own understanding, or over the heads of their pupils." These instructions are to be given two or three times a week; the pupils are to be taught how to pray, and are to be properly prepared for the Sacraments.

Great care is to be taken to guard the innocence of the children; they are to be inspired to love God, and to fear greatly to displease or disobey Him, to detest evil, to avoid falsehood and deceit, to love the truth and the light, to be always in sight of the others, and to shun idleness.

The specific idea of bringing up girls to be the future mothers is very clearly set forth in Frances' chapters. She never lost sight of Angela's conviction that the girls were destined to regenerate society. "They shall form the manners of the girls," she says emphatically, "in the discretion and modesty characteristic of the wisest and most virtuous *Christian women, who live honorably in the world.*"

Contrary to the spirit of the old monastic training of girls, everything peculiar to religious life is to be avoided. "Take care not to introduce anything that belongs to the religious life, either by talking, or in any other way, and much more, must they not try to attract them to it in words or by any tacit means."

With the Ursulines, the young girl who conceived the idea of being a religious must do it of her own initiative. The *Rule* even in its Primitive form, under Angela, forbade receiving any subject under force.

In these chapters, the warm and lively spirit evinced, the words that come from the heart and go to the heart, the frequent quoting of the Scriptures, all of which are likewise characteristics of Angela Merici, betray the hand of Frances de Bermond, who studied the Foundress so closely and lovingly, and whom contemporaries praised for her appealing language, her eminent intelligence, her poetical talents and her profound knowledge of the Bible.<sup>36</sup>

That Frances had one thought only, in the penning of these chapters, namely, to add to the *Rule* of Angela some full instructions upon the duties of Ursulines in the school, is plain, for in them she makes no reference to conventual habits or monastic life. The matter is remarkably original and individual, with the emphasis thrown entirely upon teaching. Most notably is accentuated the reciprocal effect between the Ursulines' work of education and that of their own personal sanctification; her words form one of the golden passages of the *Ursuline Rule*:<sup>37</sup>

*"The Ursulines vow and promise to employ themselves in instructing young girls, proposing this for their principal end and aim, disposing to this effect all their charges and offices, and devoting themselves to this with all their strength and concentration of mind, considering that by this means they fulfil their vocation."*

Undoubtedly, that which would have pleased Angela best in the chapters written by Frances de Bermond was this stress which Frances laid upon teaching as the objective of the institute, and her insistence upon the Mother-idea in the school. It was not without a concentrated meaning, so concluded Frances, — an implied power, to use a modern term, — that Angela had added to her teaching-injunction the final phrase:

"Do not fail to teach good conduct, as well as good doctrine." This phrase Frances proceeded to amplify according to the needs of her generation.

Now, Frances' teaching, in its day, created a great sensation.<sup>38</sup> New and original, it attracted, as we shall have occasion to note, a

<sup>36</sup> For discussion of Frances' authorship of these chapters in the *Paris Constitutions*, see *History of Constitutions*, Sec. 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Constitutions of Paris*, Part I, Chap. I, Art. I.

<sup>38</sup> See *Madame de Sainte Beuve et les Ursulines de Paris*, H. Leymont.

wide and marked attention. The authority on the Constitutions goes on to say: "These demands, education for family life, and for Christian life in the world preëminently, seem to us today a matter of course; yet in the days of Frances de Bermond, and in the days of Angela Merici, it was really a new form of education and made a great stir."

A second novelty which actually aroused suspicion in certain quarters of France, was the program of a thorough education for girls, particularly in religion. Luther, at that time, was demanding schools for young girls. Now, by a curious logic, it was considered somewhat "lutherian" in Paris to have girls educated in the sciences. People thought it safer to guard the girls in their faith and innocence by keeping them ignorant of these!

Such was the popular view of the matter; but contrary to the popular view, contrary to the spirit of the century, Frances and Mme. de Sainte Beuve, the Paris foundress, both agreed perfectly on this point — a broader education, — knowing themselves to be one with Angela, the original author of the Ursuline idea. As a result of their conviction, the ordinance to include a thorough education was inserted in the foundation chapters of the *Paris Constitutions*, in order to ensure its being carried out, and thus it remains to this day.

It was in this sense that the Paris foundresses interpreted Angela herself when she wrote "l'antica strada e vita nuova. . . The old way and the new life!"

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### ANGELA'S IDEA OF NON-ENCLOSURE

#### I

AS LONG as Angela lived, no one dared disapprove of the new kind of religious life she had established; but scarcely had she gone to rest with the Brescian Martyrs in their quiet crypt, than the mutterings of storm were heard. Very learned men, ostensibly impelled by zeal, denounced her work, "under pretense of good," as Angela had predicted. Plausibly they argued that it was not prudent for the sisters to live with their families, that convents had been made for such as they, and that they could not without grave disorders, live elsewhere.

Father de Gondi, Spiritual Director of the Company at the time, getting at the root of the opposition, said: "The main objections come from the parents themselves, especially from rich and noble people; these would prefer to see their daughters either married or admitted into convents. They are reluctant to think, that after their own death, these daughters should remain free under the paternal roof, with their inheritance at command, the delicate treasury of their virginity to be guarded."<sup>1</sup> His remark was the first indication of that strange reaction of the 16th and 17th centuries upon the institute of Angela, brought about by the economic conditions in which it was embedded, as we shall presently show.

Thus, the first members of the Company had scoffs and tribulation to endure, at home as well as abroad. Valiant defenders arose, however, who, by word of mouth and in writing, answered those whose aim was to force the sisters into cloistered life.

"It is a delight and a marvel," wrote Canon Tribesco, "to see these doves of heaven, gathering in at the Lord's fountain to lave their wings of stain, to nourish themselves with the grain of the elect, to quench their thirst with the wine of virginity; and then to go back

<sup>1</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 45.



home, with minds and hearts centred in heaven. Once such good things could be enjoyed only within cloistered walls; but now, in our day, they can be had in the world, because of the work of Angela Merici."

Tribesco was a personal friend of Angela; it was to him, it may be remembered, that she showed in her two hands how much bread she could manage to live upon.

"Go to any church," he said, "or along any of our streets, and you will meet some of her daughters. You will scent the good odor of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Another defendant protested that an honorable marriage or life in a convent is sometimes impossible for a girl, because of poverty, or sickness, or help which she is in duty bound to give parents or members of her family. He argued too that there are others who remain in the world, because God calls them to a kind of work which cloistered nuns could not do.<sup>3</sup>

Some years later, when Gian Paolo Usupini had succeeded Cabrini in the direction of the Company, there arose a new wave of opposition on the old score. Again arguments were advanced that the daughters of Angela ought to live together in convents. Father Usupini insisted upon the original ordinances of the Foundress. But without knowledge of the officers of the Company, certain persons in authority in the city actually sent a petition to the Holy See, that the Ursulines be obliged to live retired in community. Fortunately, just at that time, the brother of Father Usupini was in Rome, together with the Vicar, Father Landini; these men fought the petition, showing how disciplined and virtuous were the lives of the sisters, and how much good had been accomplished, so the result was an order issued from Rome that no change should be made.<sup>4</sup>

Hardly had the first opposition regarding cloister subsided, when there arose another contradiction of the original institute.

Angela had never prescribed any outward badge to distinguish the

<sup>2</sup> Tribesco, quoted by Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 45.

<sup>3</sup> Madame Girelli, who was the modern banner-bearer of Angela's idea, concludes the subject by quoting St. Paul on special gifts and on how the measure of recompense on the last day will not be excellence of one's state, but of one's virtues. She closes as follows: "Either the convent or marriage. Such an alternative is false, dangerous, and contrary to the teaching of the Church, and to the example of Christians in the first ages." § 45.

<sup>4</sup> Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 50.

members of her Company, but now, certain ecclesiastics began to suggest that they adopt a black habit with a white headdress, and a Franciscan cord, or leather cincture, blessed as a symbol of chastity and penance.<sup>5</sup> The Augustinian Fathers were for the cincture. They advocated it with professed sisters, as well as with Countess Lodrone, the Mother General. On the contrary Countess Ginevra Luzzago, together with the four Assistants, supported by Angela's former secretary, the priest, Gabriel Cozzano, resisted the proposal,<sup>6</sup> and many of the sisters, likewise, set before Countess Lodrone their reasons against such innovation. They held that the adoption of a distinctive dress might lead to dissensions in families, bad example, and perhaps might bring ill repute upon the Company itself, if a sister should in any way fail to live up to the standard of her state. These begged to be allowed the literal sense of their *Rule*, which ordered all "to dress in a simple and modest manner."<sup>7</sup>

The request was denied by decree, December 11, 1545. The Mother General ordered that "all the sisters, under pain of expulsion, wear the blessed cincture, to distinguish them from other women." As a result, all the members who refused would have to be expelled. But the Episcopal See being vacant, the Vicar General of the diocese insisted upon the sisters enjoying freedom of action in the matter. At this juncture, there arrived from Rome the Papal Bull of 1544 approving the Company of St. Ursula, whereupon the cincture party, in accepting it, managed to obtain from the Pope, for sake of conciliation, an Indulgence of One Hundred Days for members who would wear a cincture like that of the Augustinians. And so, after a long period of trouble which profoundly disturbed the young institute, the Bishop, with the Commissaries Apostolic, signed a decree in 1546, which settled the matter of the costume; the Ursulines henceforth, were to wear a black dress, a long leather cincture with an iron buckle, a white linen veil, a bandeau with a guimpe.<sup>8</sup>

So in this dress they came to be familiar figures. In Salò they found much to do; in Desenzano, also; the city of Cremona opened

<sup>5</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 317.

<sup>6</sup> Salvatori, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Rule*, Chap. 2, On Clothing.

<sup>8</sup> "The Pope settled the question of a special badge of chastity, by granting an Indulgence to all who would wear such a token, the leather cincture." Pastor, *History of the Popes*, Vol. XI, p. 528. Cf. Salvatori, *op. cit.*, p. 217, *seq.*

a new field to them in 1565, and in two more years they were in Bergamo. There was talk of them now in Milan.

"A grand and noble scheme!" exclaimed Faino: "altogether novel at that period, and never before attempted by any one higher in position or authority than Angela."<sup>9</sup> Her genius manifestly consisted in seeing the need of the present moment, and this same genius she desired to leave as a legacy to her Company, as its characteristic lineament. This was a turning point in the history of cloister, a far cry from that day in 603 A.D. when Saint Leander, drawing up conventual rules for his sister, Florentine, condemned "the error of those, who believed they could consecrate their virginity to God, without shutting themselves up in monasteries, remaining instead in their families, or in isolated cells in cities, or among all the cares of domestic life."<sup>10</sup>

The most distinctive comment made upon Angela's historical position by such Renaissance historians as notice her, refers to her accentuation of the home influence. Pastor remarks, that the Company of St. Ursula, diffused over northern Italy, proved to be one of the most important factors in the revival of Christian spirit in families. This great work could never have been accomplished had the Company been cloistered.

Angela was a great reader of the early Christian Fathers. She could hardly fail to observe the fact, that in the first centuries of the Church, when the duel had been pagan *versus* Christian, just as it was in that society which surrounded her, when the clash of ideals was equally radical, great stress had been laid upon home education, a task commended in special manner to Christian mothers. Habitually brooding over the problems of girls' education, she could not fail to notice how in the early Church under such matrons as Macrina, Emmelia, Novina, Anthusa, Monica and Paula, the home influence did counteract with great success the influence of the pagan schools,<sup>11</sup> which observation was probably one of the subtle influences that made Angela lean strongly towards an uncloistered institute.

<sup>9</sup> Noted by Girelli, *op. cit.*, § 36.

<sup>10</sup> Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, "Letter of St. Leander," Vol. IV, p. 189. Cf. Lingard's *Antiquities of the Saxon Church*, Vol. II, p. 193.

<sup>11</sup> Turner, s. v. Schools, *Cath. Encyc.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 555-562.

## II

St. Charles Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan, was not slow to perceive the efficacy of the new army of workers. Father Landini of Brescia, one of the Directors of the Company at the time, was asked for information regarding it, and he wrote to Milan the following letter, which sums up the activities of Angela's daughters during the last half of the sixteenth century. The letter was dated December 21, 1566.

"This Company has given sisters to all the hospitals of Brescia. It directs schools for little girls to give them Christian instruction. God makes use of it for the conversion of souls and to attract to his service many families, among whom these sisters live.

"It would be hard to say, hard to make you understand, all the good which the Lord derives from this holy Company in every sort of work of piety and mercy. The Company frequent the Sacraments, cultivate prayer, spread the Divine worship. The evangelical virtues of poverty and obedience shine within it. Truly, it is a marvel of God's power and goodness, this spectacle of delicate young girls, who reviving the spirit of Agnes and of Agatha, dwell intact amid perils and scandals."<sup>12</sup>

When he read this letter, "These are just the women for my purpose," thought St. Charles; for one of his most cherished enterprises was the establishment of schools for the teaching of Christian Doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

The year after Angela called her ladies to sign their names to the register of the Company at St. Afra's, the year 1535, a system of Sunday schools came into existence in the city of Milan, and it was not long before Brescia began to feel this new breath of life, even though it was scarcely perceptible amid the exhalations arising from the confusion of the times. It was St. Charles' own uncle, Pius IV, who encouraged the movement in Rome itself donating a church for the workers in 1562, whence they began teaching in schools, private houses, streets.<sup>14</sup> St. Charles drew up rules for the Confraternity

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Postel, *op. cit.*, I, 322.

<sup>13</sup> See Drane, *Christian Schools and Scholars*, p. 724. At St. Charles' death he left 740 poor schools, 273 superintendents, 1,726 workers, 40,098 pupils.

<sup>14</sup> *Cath. Encyc.* Vol. III, p. 711.



which he found doing such good work, establishing it in many parishes of the Milanese diocese, and once more is observable the vigor with which this extra-institutional phase of the Church's life asserted itself under pressure of a difficult age. St. Charles was anxious to interest persons of both sexes in the work, and so hearing from Landini's letter that the Company of St. Ursula in Brescia were already launched in the campaign, he called twelve of them to Milan, gave them a house to live in, designing any new members to remain in their own homes,<sup>15</sup> and the coöperation of these Ursulines was one element in the success of the schools of the Christian Doctrine. Thus, the new sisterhood, uncloistered, first attracted attention even in foreign countries. St. Francis de Sales was watching them from afar and other bishops as well, among them, Denys de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyons, who figured later in their story.<sup>16</sup> St. Charles loved the Company of St. Ursula. He often visited the sisters in Milan, lavishing upon them every mark of benevolence. They soon became the tutelary angels of the place;<sup>17</sup> out into the street they streamed every day in search of pupils, instructing women and children, while some of the great ladies of Milan were not too proud to assist at their conferences, especially as the Cardinal himself was often there.<sup>18</sup> During his Fourth Provincial Council, he urged his suffragan bishops to establish Ursulines not only in towns but in country places.<sup>19</sup> Finally, when the pestilence broke out during those two fatal years in Milan, the Ursulines were his mainstay in relief work. Later, in erecting a collegio in the city

<sup>15</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 343.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bougaud, *History of St. Chantal*, Vol. I.

<sup>17</sup> Guissano, *Life of St. Charles Borromeo*, Lib. VII, Chap. 22.

<sup>18</sup> See also for *Cath. Doctrine Schools*, *Cath. Encyc.*, Vol. III, p. 621, and Guissano, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 118, 132, 326; Vol. II, p. 371.

<sup>19</sup> *Concilium Mediolanense IV*, c. 13. Mansi, *Collect. Council*. Vol. XXXIV, Col. 329. "Two sodalities, namely the sisters of St. Ursula and the widows of St. Ann, have been formally established in some towns of the province and have conformed to the rules of religious life, and by God's help, have done exceedingly good work among our people and their families, by striving to lead the lives of our women to more fervent practice of purity and of Christian piety and Charity. Wherefore each bishop shall consider it opportune to introduce both these sodalities in the larger cities and towns of his diocese." Cf. *Kirchenlexicon*, s.v. *Ursulinerinnen*, Vol. XII, p. 500, *seq.* This legislation indicates St. Charles' solicitude for the Ursulines. His great watchword for them was "spread." He used every means of his office and the law to accomplish it. His laws reveal his motives; history shows his success. Also, Bertolotti, *Storia*, p. 204.

under patronage of S. Sofia, it was to them he confided the charge of teaching.

Meantime, in Brescia it became evident that the Company needed a house where aged and infirm members might find refuge, and from this need arose that tendency towards community life which appeared so early in the history of the association and which resolved itself in different places so differently. The appreciation of the townspeople for the new work showed in the promptness with which the two ladies, Camilla and Ottavia Rodengo, perceiving the need, bequeathed to the sisters in Brescia a piece of property for such members as by poverty or infirmity were in need of a home.

As to the sisters in Milan who were living in the house given them by St. Charles at their first coming, the Cardinal had their rights to do this substantiated by Bull from Gregory XIII, which authorized them to live in community life, "senza esser di clausura," without cloister, devoted to the education of children.<sup>20</sup> There seems to be no definite evidence on the part of the Cardinal that he was fulfilling his own desires in the matter; it appears to have been rather to satisfy the sisters, a movement from within the Company itself, a tendency to withdraw more from the difficulties of family life, perhaps, to possess a house of their own in order to live more quietly with their work undisturbed.<sup>21</sup> Still, they were not cloistered at all. This same manner of living appeared in Brescia, too, before the close of Angela's century.

St. Charles' pronouncing the Ursuline status to be "senza esser di clausura," necessitates here a clear understanding in the mind of the reader of that which is implied in the term clausura, or cloister, or enclosure, in as far as it touches upon Ursuline history. The English terms, cloister and enclosure, are derived from the Latin, signifying a key, lock, or barrier on the one hand, and the place that is shut off by key, lock, or barrier on the other, in the practise of monastic rule or life.<sup>22</sup> This would embrace the buildings used by the religious persons, in which according to their own rules they are required to stay, and from which outsiders are excluded. Formally speaking, the cloister is the law by which they are bound to live

<sup>20</sup> Bertolotti, *op. cit.*, p. 209. This distinction gave them the name of Ursulines of St. Charles.

<sup>21</sup> Bertolotti, *Storia*, pp. 208, 209.

<sup>22</sup> Schaaf, *Dissertation on Cloister*, Cincinnati, 1921, p. 1.

within these limits monastic and not go beyond them except as permitted by that law; and at the same time, persons not belonging to the religious community are excluded.

From an architectural point of view, generations of intelligent monks had gradually shaped the economy of monastic establishments either for men or for women; many of these venerable establishments are still today among the glories of European architecture; suffice to say, that plans were gradually evolved for the buildings to serve at once the monks' greater convenience, and to safeguard them against intrusion from without.<sup>23</sup>

The Ursulines' "senza esser di clausura" means then, that to them, as a body, no restriction of place was to be set, although they now had the privilege of living together at convenience, instead of scattered in their respective family homes. From all this it is clear that St. Charles Borromeo did not cloister the Ursulines, according to the statement that is sometimes made. What the Cardinal did was merely to conventualize them. They had not asked for enclosure. At that time, as we shall have occasion to observe, no cloister except the strictest was recognized by the Church.

The Company in Brescia possess precious memories and traditions of St. Charles. They recall with pride how, when he transmitted to the sisters of Milan the desired Bull, he took special occasion to praise the daughters of Angela of the strictly Primitive form, declaring that their life and their work were confounding the cloisters.<sup>24</sup> At another time, in a sermon to some nuns he said that it was matter of confusion to them to behold certain souls like the Sisters of St. Ursula, "so full of a taste for the things of God," so retired, so mortified, so unassuming.<sup>25</sup> He obtained for the Company the privilege of a Visitor General, and later, in that capacity, he showed them what a truly interested friend he was. His famous canonical Visitation of Brescia is still, to the little city, one of the glories of the past. In memorable splendor he made his entrance, February 24, 1580, welcomed with enthusiasm.<sup>26</sup> All the municipal dignitaries formed the escort of honor with the old Brescian families, now familiar to us through the pages of this narrative: the Porcellagas,

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Ste. A. M. Paris*, I, p. 281.

<sup>25</sup> Postel, I, p. 332.

<sup>26</sup> *Brixia Sacra*, July-Sept. 1910, pp. 275, 276, 278.

Chizzolas, Peschieras, Martinenghi and the rest. "To the priests involved in this visitation," wrote Ven. Alessandro Luzzago, who knew the Cardinal intimately, "he was more the loving father than the severe judge,"<sup>27</sup> yet the conditions he had to contend with must have tried his paternal heart.<sup>28</sup> But this was "the city of his predilection."<sup>29</sup> At the time of his visitation he revised and approved Angela's *Rule*, conforming it more exactly to the Council of Trent which had intervened since her death. His letter to the sisters closed thus: "We recommend you to God that he may bless you, by increasing your number every day, and by adding to your virtues."<sup>30</sup>

Upon his return home the Cardinal prevailed upon the Milanese sisters to adopt the same dress as the Brescian branch, and two years later, at their request, he revised their *Rule* slightly also to meet certain needs, adding to it the three vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience, to be pronounced in public ceremony.<sup>31</sup> The Ursulines of Milan were to live in community henceforth with a code of observances distinctively their own, and for the first time were to be recognized as religious; they continued to attend the Schools of Christian Doctrine and had a school in their own house.<sup>32</sup> The Cardinal died shortly after, leaving in Milan eighteen houses, and six hundred Ursulines.

Thus Milan is considered the second primitive province or congregation of the Company of St. Ursula.

<sup>27</sup> *Letter of Ven A. Luzzago in Brixia Sacra, Idem, p. 281.*

<sup>28</sup> Cf. p. Guerrini, *La Visita di S. Carlo alla Diocesi di Brescia, in Brixia Sacra*, July-Sept. 1910, cited from the acts of the Visitation, A. C. A. di Milano, Vol. III, f. 222 e seg: "clerici in civitate et diocesi ne quaquam studiis, verum ocio et vitiis diditi; multi curata beneficia obtinentes non resident et tollerantur absentes sine causa . . . regulares quidam habent parochias magnas et in hiis male se gerunt ac orta sunt scandala. . . . Plurimi regulares valde scandalosi et maxime circa frequentiam monasteriorum; familiaritas nimia cum laicis; meretricum et lenonum copia sparsim in diocesi; concubinari perplures inveterati in civitate et diocesi; schola doctrinae christianae non admodum frequentata . . . itemque plurima homicidia et assassinia; diocesis non visitatur ab episcopo; clerici in Seminario male disciplinati, litterarum inperiti. . . ."

<sup>29</sup> *Letter of Ven A. Luzzago, op. cit., p. 282.*

<sup>30</sup> Girelli, *Vita*, § 50.

<sup>31</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 343. This Rule of St. Charles was approved in 1907, with modifications, by the S. Cong. Cf. Bertolotti, *Storia*, p. 210. Today their mother-house is in Via Lanzone, Milan.

<sup>32</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 326.



## III

Yet, in spite of the success to which Angela's *Rule* was leading, some curious developments had presented themselves elsewhere before the close of the 16th century. In the first place, when the popular new form of life appeared in Parma in 1595, it was no longer democratic as first conceived by Angela,<sup>33</sup> but was under aristocratic patronage and on class basis; proofs of nobility were required for admission, while forty ladies of noble birth formed the community with twenty lay sisters — the first recognition of class distinction in the history of the Company. Here, besides, for the first time, secular education, so-called, was superadded to religious instruction. Still more of the idea of aristocracy entered into the institute in the city of Venice, where the members were called "Réligieuses Nobles." In Foligno they regulated that the superior and seven sisters were to reside together by way of a centre, the rest in their homes; and when in 1601, the Company began to appear in Rome, it was with semi-cloister and no vows, all the sisters living together by approbation of Pope Clement VIII.

And still, while these modifications, most of them contradictory to the original plan, were springing up in Italy where the Company was so popular, the organization was finding its way into southern France through the venerable César de Bus, under whose direction Frances de Bermond was establishing a community in the Isle de Sorgue and following Angela's own *Primitive Rule*, unmodified.

The distinction between "episcopal cloister" and "demi-cloister" must, at this stage of our narrative be well conceived, in order to understand the subsequent history of Angela's Company, as it was affected by the monastic conditions of the age. The ideal and end of religious life being the perfection springing from union with God in love, its own point of view demanded the protection of cloister against the encroachments that would frustrate its work. Cloister then originated, not in the Church, but in the system of monasticism, and the Church in supporting monasticism, made use of monastic law. As in the early ages of the institution the male life was active and the life of women mainly contemplative, the laws of

<sup>33</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, I, p. 345.

cloister were stricter for the latter, not only guarding their chastity but also shielding them from distraction; they were forbidden to leave their convents, or to admit outside persons, especially of the other sex. Cloister is generally understood in the law to be of two kinds, papal and episcopal; <sup>34</sup> with reference to its extent, it may be total or partial; total, when all the buildings except the church, parlor and guest rooms are subject to enclosure; partial, when only a part of the house is subject to it. Episcopal enclosure is the term generally applied to that which is binding merely by jurisdiction of the bishop upon religious who make Simple Vows; whereas papal cloister is that which protects Solemn Vows, and is governed in all details, including penalties for violation, by the law of the Church, the constitutions laid down by various Popes, Decrees of the Sacred Congregation, and by the Council of Trent.<sup>35</sup> Today papal enclosure is regulated by Code. But always papal enclosure has imposed greater strictures upon women than upon men; religious women may not leave their own enclosure; lay women may not enter male enclosure.

As cloister existed to guard the vows, it is clear that vows also, would be of two kinds, Simple and Solemn. Simple Vows admit easily of the possibility of dispensation, nor do they annihilate individual rights, whereas the Solemn Vows annul all rights, and are but rarely dispensed from. In mediaeval Europe, where society was Catholic, a Solemn Vow was recognized by State as well as Church as depriving a subject absolutely of ownership in money or property, and rendering marriage not only sinful but completely invalid. These discriminations will come to exert strong bearing upon the history of Angela's Company of St. Ursula.

#### IV

The cenobitic idea may have been old as Christendom and older, but monasticism grew up with the Feudal System. Historians have pointed out the nucleus of family life in the Middle Ages as existing in the feudal castle where the lordly proprietor with his wife and children held within himself all rights, all power, living separated

<sup>34</sup> Valentine Schaaf, O.F.M., *Dissertation on Cloister*, p. 1-4.

<sup>35</sup> *Idem*, p. 3.

from the people who were huddled together at the foot of the baronial stronghold, an isolation that emphasized family relation and intensified family traditions. It was the era of family life *per se*, an era in which the preëminence of domestic life dominated the laws of society as never before and never since.<sup>36</sup> And out of the influence of this domestic existence sprang that striking feature of feudal society, the principle of inheritance which existed in the feudal family, the spirit of perpetuity, the natural offshoot of family life, nourished at that time by the very nature of the property with which the family itself was bound up. The feudal lands, fiefs as they were called, naturally demanded an owner who could at need defend them, and by his personality maintain their position in the midst of the other great fiefs of the realm; clearly, this need would intensify and knit together still more the family unit. But as the feudal system provided no superiority that held any real political power in the realm, force became the only guarantee of right. Every baronial law had to depend entirely upon force to insure itself. Feudalism gave neither legal order nor a political guarantee for society.<sup>37</sup> The right of resistance, the right of personal resistance, was the only principle that maintained.

When then, this feudal order with its jealousy of inheritance, narrowed itself down under the law of primogeniture which dominated Europe from the Baltic to the Mediterranean throughout the Catholic Middle Ages, it became so entangled with the fate and fortunes of that system of monasticism which presented a growth parallel with its own, that the interaction of the two institutions developed into one of the most curious phenomena of history.

The law of primogeniture placed the family fief in the hands of the oldest child, and in families, which in those days commonly numbered anything from five to twenty children, the problem of providing for the nineteen was the Gordian Knot of society. The marriage dowry of the daughters was one of the special features of the systems; an unmarried daughter, a spinster, was an anomaly in society; a girl must occupy a definite position in life; if she was not to be wife and mother, she would be a nun and pray for the members

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Guizot's *History of Civilization in Europe*. Lecture IV, On Feudalism, pp. 74-85.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

of her family. If she had a good dowry, perhaps some side inheritances through her mother or some childless uncle, a good match was arranged for her long before the element of personal attractiveness could have anything to do with swaying the choice. If the dowry were small, she was no bait for desirable suitors, hence it were best for her to go into the convent, where certainly she must bring a small sum with her, but not such as was demanded for marriage. Pious people often endowed cells in monasteries<sup>38</sup> just as today multi-millionaires endow whole institutions, so a girl with little or no dower might be lucky enough to secure such a harbor, if her family possessed influence, and her mind could be brought to consider higher life. The great trouble was that Clarissa or Clotilda was sometimes given to understand that she had no choice in the matter, so she had to put the best face on it that she could.

The feudal principle of force held good in both cases, marriage and monastery. Who shall say which fared better, Adelaide, led by the hand to the monastic door by her fond mama with her young inclinations all unsounded, or Jane, led by her determined papa to meet an unknown and undesired Geoffry at the altar rail? To be sure, at haphazard, the world decides that Jane encounters at least the advantage of variety and social distraction, but there are some who will not hesitate to prefer that peace which Adelaide may find. To the mind of ultra-modern society, neither the tyranny of marriage nor the tyranny of the cloister is at all to be endured, but the feudal mind held a different viewpoint. The mind of Catholic mediaeval Europe looked to the possibilities that lie both in grace and in nature. It believed that, in the Providence of God, the nurturing sunshine falls alike on lily and sparrow. Both matrimonial vows and monastic vows were to them consecrated with the blessing of religion and for both they expected the advent of a grace of state. Who shall say that the child's chances in life under the feudal system were actually less than under the customs which prevail today?

However, the restlessness that might arise in marriage found its outlet in the ordinary channels of familiar human experience, but not so with that in the cloister. In considering this matter let us not foreshorten the view. For just as in human society those who choose the cloister are as one to a million, just so must be the proportion

<sup>38</sup> *St. Teresa's Letters*, Stanbrooke Edition.



of those who enter unsuited to the life, as compared with the main body of subjects.

The history of the monastic system shows that perhaps but one in a hundred fails to adjust herself. Still, a first noticeable unrest began to appear during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, an unrest purely local, as the records of the Church Councils in those centuries show.<sup>39</sup> In a small number of religious houses some members had been taking too great liberty regarding enclosure. Adelaide and Giannina finding themselves discontented, appealed to noble cousins of theirs who made it easy for them to take their way back, if not to the paternal estate, at least to some relatives who joyed in using them as hostages, perhaps in a family feud, in order to force ransom from the irate father. Then a girl's vows would have to be settled by proper dispensation from ecclesiastical authorities, and next, and here lay the crux of the situation, her brothers and sisters would be called upon to share their inheritance with their unfortunate sister in order to provide a marriage dowry and get the troublesome member settled once for all!<sup>40</sup> In the large family connections of those days it is easy to see what widening circles of disturbance the dropping of one stone into the pool might create. Nor is it difficult to conceive what effect the repetition of such an experience would have upon the public, nor is it at all inconceivable that the feeling of insecurity arising in families would, by degrees, affect the whole state of society; that the public would eventually react or at least arouse a sympathetic fear in the guardians of ecclesiastical discipline; and that in a feudal régime where the eldest son became the father of the new family, and his younger brothers in the Church were profoundly disturbed by the sad experience of their sister or niece, pressure would undoubtedly be brought to bear upon ecclesiastical legislation to provide, for such contingencies, a remedy that would be final.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Schaaf, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> A. Cassa, *Monasteri di Brescia*, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 314: "Au fond, ceux qui parlaient le plus haut en ce sens obeissaient a l'esprits de mécontentement de plusieurs familles riches et en vue qui ne se faisaient point a l'idée de garder aupres d'elles de filles non mariées. Ce furent, ces mêmes raisons, assurément graves, qui firent introduire plus tard (en 1612) la clôture." "Which," he notes, "made them introduce cloister later!" But the Abbé goes on to say, that at the time of Angela's death, cloister was not necessary: it contradicted the will of the Foundress; "denatured her institute, annihilated her *Rule*."

## V

Hence arose the famous Canon Law, *Periculoso*, 1298 A.D., by which Boniface VIII imposed perpetual enclosure upon monks and nuns with a view to putting an end to the disturbance.<sup>42</sup> The prevalent feudal conception of things naturally colored the sternness of this decree, that feudalism which depended upon force alone to produce results. The European society which demanded this legislation accepted it as a matter of course. Boniface made papal enclosure imperative, allowing the nuns no appeal in the matter and, furthermore, directing that, if necessary, the aid of the secular power was to be invoked, — to enforce his restrictions, the power of Catholic government. For instance, in case of two renegade nuns in Brescia, the Venetian government arrested and flogged every waggoner or carrier, lackey or inn-keeper, that helped the unfortunate creatures.<sup>43</sup> The Pope's legislation had for its object the protection of monastic life, the security of the religious who for the sake of the few who failed to live up to its high ideal and gave scandal, were willing to assume even stricter obligations in order to maintain their life of calm recollection, union with God, and ceaseless prayer for all mankind.<sup>44</sup>

In order to raise the lowered standard and to clothe it with honor for sake of that portion of society who chose the monastic form of life, and in order to secure the happiness and well-being of families by preventing the return of their professed cloistered daughters to claim their share of the paternal fortunes, or to raise legal complications about dispensations from monastic vows in favor of marriage vows, or worse still, to disgrace their kith and kin by wandering about as anchorless members of society, Boniface VIII imposed upon all monasteries an enclosure that was irrefragable. To this he added Vows, which in their Solemnity nullified the possession of property and invalidated marriage. No longer need the families fear.

However, the course of political events prevented the law *Periculoso* from holding back the movement of unrest.<sup>45</sup> Things went from

<sup>42</sup> Schaaf, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>43</sup> A. Cassa, *Monasteri di Brescia*, *op. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Catholic Encyc. s.v. Cloister*, IV, 60-64.

<sup>45</sup> Coulton, in his recent book (G. G. Coulton, *Five Centuries of Religion*, Vol. I,

bad to worse, although the disorders seem to have prevailed more among men than women, as statistics show that most of the nuns observed the Periculoso, the number of those disregarding cloister being but small in comparison with the majority.<sup>46</sup> And especially was the misfortune immensely complicated when, after a hundred long years of confused authority, caused by the Avignon captivity of the Papacy and its lamentable sequel, the Western Schism,<sup>47</sup> the governing power of the entire monastic system became enervated. Violation of cloister would have been the very first evidence of disorder.

"Constrained against their will to take the veil in order to satisfy the unjust prejudices and cupidity of their families, they could not all free themselves from resentment, and serenely comply with the sacrifices of their youth and the tendencies of their own nature. . . . What marvel that a longing for liberty tempted their fiber, an impulse of rebellion disturbed their mind, or that natural instincts, artificially compressed on the one side, rose up more powerful and irritated on the other?"<sup>48</sup> Fortunately, times have changed. No longer may one say that monasteries serve for the alleviation of many noble families in country and town."<sup>49</sup>

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Cambridge, 1923), p. 436, claims: "The real tragedy of later monasticism is that it was never willing to recognize how far it was drifting behind its own times; it knew not the time of its visitation;" the statement may be true provided monasticism be looked upon as but one phase of the feudal system; the fact was, that it could not be disengaged as an entity from the network of society of which it was made up; every monastery was connected with scores of European families by hundreds of threads; what affected the family affected the monastic system, and vice versa. Coulton's epilogue is a plea for tolerance in judging the monastic point of view; he was born under shadow of Greyfriars; his first schoolboy essay was an attempt to arouse interest in things monastic and for twenty years he studied the subject. He does not, however, look at its feudal aspects, nor does he see it from the inner view-point of canon-law. His sympathies are shown in the passage, "Must we, therefore, condemn our fathers for having been what they were, or condemn those of our own generation for being so different from their fathers?"

<sup>46</sup> Schaaf, *Cloister*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>47</sup> 1305-1376 A.D.; and 1376-1417 A.D.

<sup>48</sup> Cassa, *op. cit.* For a clear view of monastic conditions in Brescia in 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, see Cassa's forty pages on "Monasteri di Brescia e le Monache di S. Caterina," in *Commentari dell' Ateneo di Brescia*, 1900.

<sup>49</sup> No candidates can now be admitted to the novitiate of a religious house who have not completed their fifteenth year. And the Council of Trent, 1569, not only excommunicated those who would force a woman to enter but also prescribed that each postulant before taking the veil or novice before making vows, must be examined

It was, of course, the duty of the nuns to obey the laws of the Church; but such was the deplorable condition of affairs from the pressure of family economics upon the monastic state, that in monasteries where the Periculoso had been set aside or overstepped, nuns who had formerly been willing to adhere to the obligations which they had assumed at the time of Profession, were now loath to tolerate new burdens, since they already felt their own too heavy.<sup>50</sup> And what made the matter still more difficult was that some communities had become so poor that the nuns had to go out of the cloister and beg. In Spain, St. Teresa tells of nuns going to stay with their relatives for months at a time because of shortage in the monastery funds.<sup>51</sup>

Such were the conditions which lay at the root of that clause in Angela's Bull of Approbation, where, at her express request, Paul III declared her daughters "as much entitled to their inheritance portion, as if they had entered the marriage state or some canonically erected monastery."<sup>52</sup>

The question of cloister seems then to have been bound up in two aspects of the times which together forced the tide into certain channels; these were the problems of monastic reform and the economic problem embodied in the feudal laws of family inheritance. These two, in turn, were more or less involved in each other and reciprocally reactive. Thus, cloister was not so much fundamentally a religious problem as one with a profoundly economic basis. It had its roots in the happiness of the domestic hearth; the family caused disorder, and the disorder reacted again upon the family. Cassa cites an unhappy instance of a nun in Brescia who prepared for clandestine flight by borrowing from some merchant of the city the equivalent of her dower money, leaving to the distracted community the legal complications of settling with him or with her dismayed relatives.<sup>53</sup> One of the large-minded charities of women like Mme.

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by the Bishop or his delegate: to determine whether or not she has been unduly influenced and whether she acts with full knowledge of the step she is about to take. This legislation holds to the present day. Lanslot, *Handbook of Canon Laws*, *op. cit.*, 56-57.

<sup>50</sup> Schaaf, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>51</sup> *St. Teresa, Cartas*.

<sup>52</sup> Bull of Paul III, 1544.

<sup>53</sup> Cassa, *op. cit.*



de Sainte Beuve in healing the secret wounds of the Church in Paris in her day, was obtaining the secularization of those religious who had entered a monastery without religious vocation and whose presence there was an obstacle to reform. Through credit at Court and at Rome high-born ladies secured for many the permission to leave, found them employment, and gave them help, money and guidance.<sup>54</sup>

To Angela Merici all these social conditions were the commonplace of everyday life. The legislation of monastic affairs familiar to her was the *Periculoso* of Boniface VIII, but as she died leaving her Company of St. Ursula an entirely new entity in Brescia, untrammelled by any connections with monasticism, the bearing of feudal conditions upon her institute did not present itself for more than a quarter of a century after her death.

Conventual form, "senza esser di clausura," had been given the Company of St. Ursula by St. Charles Borromeo, but in this matter the influence of the Council of Trent, 1545-1564, was destined to play an important part, producing swift and strong reaction upon the institute, that, like a net thrown out to sea had been intended by its Foundress to yield to all tides, but to adhere firmly to its own integrity and its original purpose. The attitude of the Council towards cloister bore directly upon the Cardinal's opinions and activities. He was the nephew of Pope Pius IV, the very Pontiff who closed the final session, so when St. Charles became Archbishop of Milan, it was with the intention of making his diocese the field upon which the principles of the Catholic reaction should be put into practise.

As we have seen, the centuries immediately preceding the Council had marked the lowest level which monastic discipline had reached in any age. Angela Merici beheld the system at its lowest ebb. Indeed, the amount of abuse revealed by the Council of Trent produced so profound an impression that at one time ideas of a general suppression were current at Rome.<sup>55</sup> Still it must be borne in mind constantly, how strongly the monasteries themselves had resisted relaxation, since the real efforts towards reform sprang manifestly from the communities themselves, impelling the functionaries of the

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *From Court to Cloister*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>55</sup> Schaaf, *op. cit.*, p. 44; cf. also Waterworth, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 1868.

Council to act. In the Monastery of S. Caterina in Brescia, for example, at the time of the disorders described by Cassa, the records show one effort after another on the part of the community to rectify the disturbance, and all of the older nuns gave sworn testimony before the authorities that the superior was a woman of the greatest probity and kindness.<sup>56</sup> The reform movement depended largely for its success upon upholding the letter of the law in the matter of cloister. Recalcitrant religious must be made to stay within the cloister.

It is easy to see how all these traditions, all these tendencies leading up to the period preceding the Council, must have had a special bearing upon the mind of Angela. During the last dozen years of her life there was constant talk of the impending Council. In establishing her institute, the non-existence of any kind of cloister except that in harmony with Boniface VIII in his *Periculoso*, made it imperative for her to create a new pathway for her Company. It was a question of cloister or no cloister. And yet any conceivable institute of uncloistered religious would, in those years, prove a source of temptation and useless regrets to the discontented in the monasteries, as it would likewise be confusing to the sight of an outraged Catholic world, sick of the growing disorders which the Council of Trent finally amended. It was not, actually then, that she turned away with disappointment from the monastic conditions of her day, impeachable as these were in the neighborhood of Brescia;<sup>57</sup> but the monastic system at the time, the very structure of it, was of such texture that, good or bad, flourishing or decadent, it afforded no ledge on which she could build the nest for her fledglings. At the same time, it was her intuitive belief that the Church would eventually offer a place of protection for her new institute and this is why she regarded her work as incomplete so long as it did not bear the express sanction of the Holy See.

Angela reasoned: if the Company could support its members in the cloister, why not out of the cloister? Since so many are forced into cloister against their will, why enter at all? Let the members

<sup>56</sup> Cassa, *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> *Brixia Sacra*, July-Sept., 1910. D. Paolo Guerrini, *Visita Ap. di S. Carlo*, also see Zanelli, *Predicatori in Brescia nel quattrocento*, in *Arch. Stor. Lomb.*, March, 1901.

have their inheritance, however small, live poor, and devote their substance to the work of the Company; bind them by no vows at all at first, but use all means to develop in them a deliberate and free choice of virginity and poverty. She foresaw that it would be few members indeed of the Company of St. Ursula who would wish to die without the distinction of a public vow. In such an arrangement she considered there could be no complication of inheritance and provision, such as might arise from the return of a girl bound by Solemn Vows, and whose dowry was swallowed up in the Community.

## VI

It was in the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent that the great reform of the mediaeval monasteries was taken up, a work so happily fruitful of results. As Angela's institute was affected, if only indirectly, by this reform, it is well to have a clear understanding of its bearing upon her idea.

The Council of Trent renewed all the provisions of the Constitution *Periculoso*, and in order to secure enforcement, it made bishops the canonical guardians of the cloisters in their respective dioceses. As in many instances, monasteries which had been established outside the walls of a town were exposed without protection to "robberies and other crimes of wicked men," the nuns in these were to be transferred to old or new convents within the walls.<sup>58</sup> To counteract the evils arising from members of families being forced into monasteries for lack of dowers to make a suitable marriage, the Council of Trent legislated that a person desiring to plead compulsion must do it within five years after the vows were pronounced, and that until the case was settled, the applicant must not leave the monastery nor lay aside the habit.<sup>59</sup>

In 1566, Pius V provided further for the poverty contingency, while insisting upon enclosure being enforced according to the Bull of Boniface VIII and the legislation of the Council of Trent, which Pius pronounced *retroactive*, under penalties for any who resisted.<sup>60</sup> Schaaf continues: "Those who until then had not taken Solemn

<sup>58</sup> *Conc. Trident. Sess. XXV. de regularibus.*

<sup>59</sup> *Sess. XXV, Chap. 19, de reform.*

<sup>60</sup> Schaaf, p. 50-51.

Vows, were to be persuaded to do so and to observe strict enclosure: those communities that refused were barred from receiving candidates, so that their convent must become extinct. Remedial measures were enacted for conditions in poverty-stricken communities, while for the future, the number in each convent should not be greater than the convent could provide means for.”

The legislation enforcing and strengthening cloister continued throughout the 16th century. In 1570, and again two years later, there was further enactment, and in 1575, the same Gregory XIII, who granted the Bull of community life to St. Charles for the Milanese Ursulines, revoked, with his *Ubi Gratiae*, certain privileges that had been modifying cloisters of men.<sup>61</sup> Again in 1581, there were more statutes, and by 1599, Clement VIII was drawing in the reins even tighter still.<sup>62</sup> Thus the 16th century was a very busy one in the affairs of the cloister problem. Angela's new institute had been launched upon society at a time when men's minds were profoundly agitated about one of the principal elements which affected its structure.

Nor did all the legislation end the trouble. The most profound disturbance which the monastic establishments of Brescia ever suffered took place a hundred years after the Council of Trent.<sup>63</sup>

It was inevitable that in the midst of so much legislating and discussion, the young institute whose fortunes we are following, should, in the second half of the sixteenth century, but a few years after Angela's death, find itself swept around and around with each new current of thought. There was the traditional feeling in society, the old narrow alternative of marriage or cloister, despite the influence of Tertiaries, like the Dominicans and Franciscans to counteract it, and this brought pressure against the Ursulines as against the old monastic orders. One of St. Francis de Sales' friends called his attention to all the inconveniences that some of the Italian Bishops were suffering, who even in Milan (in Angela's institute?) could come to no understanding on the subject.<sup>64</sup>

The history of Angela's idea of non-enclosure shows the various vicissitudes of every original and unique plan which has ever been

<sup>61</sup> Schaaf, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Cassa, *Monasteri di Brescia*, *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> *Idem*, p. 48.

<sup>64</sup> Bougaud, *History of St. Chantal*, Vol. I, p. 298.



conceived by human society. Did the Foundress herself, legislating for "circumstances that should arise," foresee the tides that would sway with and against her great idea? How time would sweep her daughters into the cloister, behind the grilles of Louis XIV's Paris, and out again with the French Revolution? How a Pontiff like Pius IX, gazing over the perilous seas of society, would behold in her little Primitive Company "a great hope"? And a Leo XIII would exhort them to remain firm in the good work undertaken, and "never to swerve from the *Primitive Rule* left them as the last will of St. Angela?" And yet, it was the economic principle militating in certain districts for the first three centuries, against the spread of her Primitive Institute, that in the Providence of God drove it by force of circumstances into a position, which, almost incidentally, brought to it the highest honors of the Church.

## VII

The non-enclosure idea, as conceived by Angela Merici, reached the supreme point of its difficulties in the experience of an English woman, Mary Ward, who was born just two months after the death of St. Charles Borromeo, in November, 1589. To supply to the English people the Christian education which they had been robbed of in Henry VIII's dissolution of the English monasteries, Mary Ward was inspired to organize a band of English women to work without any religious garb in English homes, for the young of her own sex, and thus to stem the tide of the growing evil of heresy. To her, as to Angela, it came as an impelling conviction, that such a life was higher than the purely monastic. She declared that it had been assured her that she herself would advance God's glory thus more than if she entered St. Teresa's Order.<sup>65</sup> Her sisters were organized on a plan similar to that of the Jesuits; they were to live a life not less austere than that of Angela's sisters but her organization was less mild, less sweet. Her companions, commonly called the English Ladies, clad in a long black cloak that covered them from head to foot, but which could not conceal the linen band over the forehead, the distinctive mark, at that time, of conventual attire,<sup>66</sup> produced

<sup>65</sup> Chambers' *Life of Mary Ward*, Vol. I, p. 254.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

a great sensation, when in Belgium, they appeared in church with their flock of boarders.<sup>67</sup> For by the contemporary law of the Church, scholars in that day became cloistered like the nuns for the time being, and they could not return to the convent at all if they came even once out of enclosure; this was another reason why public day schools taught by nuns were impossible.<sup>68</sup>

Here, anent the dress, is recalled with satisfaction the wisdom of Angela Merici in insisting upon no distinctive religious garb for her daughters. The hue and cry against Mary Ward for her non-cloistered sisterhood, and in that very England for which they were sacrificing themselves, was almost past belief. Some of their enemies dubbed them "galloping girls," and one priest, one of many, appealed to Rome against them that "without clausure they must dissolve, which is fit were known to you!"<sup>69</sup> Her institute was opposed further because of its new plan of a Governor-General subject only to the Pope, but Clement XI, who finally in 1703 approved her *Rule*, set controversy at rest in this matter by his great "*Lasciate governare le donne dalle donne.*"<sup>70</sup>

The narrative of one of Mary Ward's sisters giving an inside report of the work they did, might have been penned by one of Angela's daughters, so like it was, transferring the scene from England to Lombardy. "I teach and instruct children in the houses of parents, which I find to be a good way, and I gain acquaintance, in winning first the affections of the parents after which with more facility their souls are converted to God. Besides teaching children, I endeavor to instruct the vulgar and simple sort. I teach them their Pater, Ave, Creed, Commandments. . . . By little and little I endeavor to root out the custom of swearing, drinking, etc. I tend and serve poor people in their sickness. In these works I spend time, not in one place but in many, where I see there is best means of honoring God. . . . It is incredible how hard a thing it is to get a priest. I had at once three persons in great distress for the space of half a year, although I went many a mile to procure one. At last I got a Benedictine. Three things I observe at the conversion of any one:

<sup>67</sup> *Idem*, Vol. II, p. 67, 254.

<sup>68</sup> Chambers', Vol. I, p. 295.

<sup>69</sup> Chambers', Vol. II, p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 296.

First, I never gain one alone, but more. Second, one at least ever dieth happily, the rest live. Third, whensoever they are reconciled, presently comes upon us much more vehement persecution." <sup>71</sup>

Mary Ward secured the opinions of Suarez and Lessius on the subject of her institute. Both agreed upon the holiness and lawfulness of the life, but Suarez considered papal approbation necessary for its perpetuity even though it was not a religious Order, in which case the decrees of the Council of Trent were in force.<sup>72</sup> Lessius considered it a stable life on account of its three vows. Angela's judgment shows by contrast here once more, for she rightly believed papal approbation the only security for her Company, and she prepared for and encouraged the vows.

By the time that Mary Ward sent in her application to Rome, however, and while her schools were beginning to spread with great success, and Angela's daughters under Frances de Bermond were multiplying in southern France like bees from a fragrant hive, the crest of the wave in favor of cloister had reached its culmination, so that Frances finally died in a cloister and the heroic Mary herself slept in peace, before Rome settled the long-winded dispute about her organization. After a painful dissolution at the hands of one pontiff, in 1630, it rose years after, in slightly modified form, as the Institute of Mary, 1703, in America known as the Ladies of Loreto.<sup>73</sup>

## VIII

The Order of the Visitation went through a similar struggle, and within the same span of years. As we have seen, Italy, first, and after it, England, and then France, awoke to the great need of an uncloistered, religious, educational service. Strange paradox, it may seem in the telling, but in two at least of these countries, the champions of the cause, under pressure of the times, had to retire behind the grilles of the ancient monasticism. When St. Francis de Sales, with ideas similar to those of Angela, yielded at last to the insistence brought to bear upon him, and St. Chantal, his spiritual daughter, closed her convent doors under the decision, converting her Order

<sup>71</sup> Chambers' *Life of Mary Ward*, Vol. II, p. 59, letter from Suffolk, 1621-1622.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>73</sup> *Cath. Encyc.*, s.v. *Mary Ward*.

for visitation of the poor into an institute of cloistered education and prayer, it is eminently significant in the history of enclosure,<sup>74</sup> for *the institute became at once in demand* in a dozen different cities.

It had been St. Francis' intention for them to go out to nurse.

"After their profession," wrote he in 1611, "they will, with God's help, go out to nurse the sick . . . only to nurse the sick; on which occasion their dress will not be different from that worn by ladies in the world . . . black and modest." (Angela's precise words.)<sup>75</sup>

They were also to instruct the ignorant in visiting the poor. The experiences which the first sisters had in homes of these people are eloquent of the need of this good work. St. Chantal has left the account in her memoirs of 1612, the very year in which Angela's daughters in Paris were canonically cloistered and pronounced their Solemn Vows.

The Visitation sisters were criticised on every score until St. Francis de Sales was wearied with their defense. To the remarks against their Simple Vows he replied that every kind of life has its inconveniences; that solitude often produces melancholy and conversation engenders distraction. The Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons, Denys de Marquemont, under whose jurisdiction some of the Visitation sisters were living, became greatly alarmed. He forbade their visits to the poor and talked of raising their branch of the institute to the dignity of a Religious Order. The Cardinal argued that a girl with only Simple Vows might return to the world and marry, and her marriage would be valid;<sup>76</sup> what law-suits! what trouble in families on account of the French inheritance laws! for security of both families and convents, there must needs be obligation of perpetual enclosure. He reminded St. Francis how, under Solemn Vows, happily, a girl could not inherit, nor bequeath property, nor validly marry. If she left the convent she could not recover her dower, hence she would remain. If this new institute went on, he thought, monasteries in which efforts were being made to reëstablish enclosure would take advantage of this example to persist in relaxation; more-

<sup>74</sup> Bougaud, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 407.

<sup>75</sup> Bougaud, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, quoting letter of Apr. 3, 1611.

<sup>76</sup> *Memoire de Denys de Marquemont Arch. de Lyons sur les Inconveniences de laisser la Visitation en Forme de Simple Congregation*, Bougaud, *op. cit.*, p. 386.



over, in the future, when first fervor is cooling, things might go on less happily. The Cardinal required, so he said, that the professed sisters never go out, except in case of absolute necessity.

Deeply distressed at such a decision, St. Chantal wrote at once to St. Francis, "I beg of you, if you can, write a word to the Archbishop of Lyons, in *strong ink!*"<sup>77</sup>

To Cardinal Bellarmine, then, the learned Jesuit doctor, now the canonized savant, St. Francis turned for advice, and the theologian wrote back:

"I would leave these maidens and widows precisely as they are. . . . I do not see why their manner of living should be changed." He referred St. Francis to religious uncloistered women in the early Christian Church.

"And Your Lordship is not ignorant of the fact that Simple Vows are not less binding nor less meritorious before God than Solemn ones, since the solemnity, as well as the enclosure, dates only from the ecclesiastical decree of this same Pope, Boniface VIII."<sup>78</sup>

It was then, really, an ancient form, this non-enclosure of Angela, at once old and yet new, known to the primitive Church, wrapped in oblivion since Boniface VIII, yet so suited to the need of the day, that though once again repressed in its evolution, it was destined nevertheless to reappear once more finally to triumph.

St. Francis acknowledged his familiarity with Angela's institute. He declared that he had prescribed the *Rule* of this new community of the Visitation only because he had seen it practised throughout Italy.<sup>79</sup> He said the formula of vows which he had drawn up was very like that used by the congregations in the Province of Milan if his memory did not deceive him.<sup>80</sup> He was referring here to the Company of St. Ursula. At last, he and St. Chantal, great saints, yielded to the Cardinal, and they yielded the more readily, St. Francis acknowledged, because, since the Archbishop of Paris had just converted the Ursulines, too, into a regular Order without

<sup>77</sup> Bougaud, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 500, Letter of July 10, 1616.

<sup>78</sup> *Idem*, p. 401, "Even today, the convent of noble ladies of St. Francis of Rome, flourishing wonderfully in Rome, have neither enclosure nor solemn profession."

<sup>79</sup> *Idem*, p. 402.

<sup>80</sup> *Idem*, p. 403.

changing their principal end, — education, — so the Visitation might be changed, without affecting its principal end, which is to receive the weak, the infirm, the aged, and give these the chance to live the higher spiritual life in assisting their neighbor. This experience shows how, in France even more than in Italy, the cloister question was rooted in the social and economic life of the people.

St. Francis knew through his great friend Cardinal de Bérulle, the ins and outs of the Ursuline movement in Paris towards cloister, as the Cardinal was one of the principal counsellors in the matter;<sup>81</sup> while St. Chantal, too, knew him personally, and, furthermore, she had often confessed to the saintly Father Jacques Gallemant, one of the three ecclesiastical directors of the Ursuline monastery in the Rue St. Jacques.<sup>82</sup> St. Francis showed marked interest in the work of Angela's daughters in their Primitive form, especially appreciating their efficiency in combating false teachings. It must have been with a certain heartache that he got a group of them together to teach in Belley, and again at Thonon, as well as in the little town of Sallanches, little hives of Ursuline workers, which he felicitously established, but which after his death were swept along with the general movement for cloister, the Thonon Sisters resisting until as late as 1634.<sup>83</sup> For the dream of St. Francis de Sales, the peculiar sympathies of his ecclesiastical bent, were for that side of the Church's maternity which has been described heretofore in these pages as non-institutional, — the social-service work among the parishes, as distinguished from concentrated service in the great ecclesiastical institutions.

All this while, however, the uncloistered Ursulines in the south of France must not be lost sight of, spreading through Arles, Toulouse, Marseilles, where César de Bus had founded for the education of the poor his Congregation of the Fathers of Christian Doctrine,<sup>84</sup> and the Ursulines, as in Italy, fell naturally into this same valuable work.

To gather up then the threads of the non-enclosure phenomenon of the 16th and 17th centuries the thesis runs as follows: the feudal

<sup>81</sup> Abbé Trou, *Vie de Jacques Gallemant*, p. 283.

<sup>82</sup> Bougaud, *op. cit.*, I, p. 258-260.

<sup>83</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 461.

<sup>84</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 327-328.

family brought about the movement of monastic unrest, and demanded, for remedy, as one might say, legislation in the Periculoso, which, however, being a law more or less feudal in character, brought no more legal order nor political guarantee of social security than did the other legislative efforts made to check that ill-balanced social system. Things went from bad to worse. At this moment Angela established an institute which she had hoped to get stabilized outside the forum of dispute. The Council of Trent then assembled, reiterating the former legislation with emphasis, laying the responsibility for cloister upon the bishops, and Pius V followed up its enactments by pronouncing them retroactive. The bishops scrupled to fail, even slightly, in harmony with the Council's decrees, and as at that critical moment, the institutes of Angela, Mary Ward and St. Francis de Sales, came face to face with the new legislation bearing a character and a spirit diametrically opposed to its standards of enclosure, their young genius was overpowered by the momentum of the great cloistral movement, so that, at the mercy of social pressure in favor of cloister, and under the power of timid or scrupulously zealous functionaries, they were all three condemned at least temporarily, to change their original nature and adopt the form already prescribed.

## IX

St. Vincent de Paul finally took up the banner of Angela Merici and with his Sisters of Charity carried out the idea of non-enclosure at last. Eight years old at the death of St. Charles Borromeo, he was a contemporary of all these workers, contemporary of Mary Ward and of St. Francis de Sales who was a personal friend. For years St. Vincent labored in Marseilles and Toulouse,<sup>85</sup> where the Ursuline daughters of Angela were teaching the poor with growing success, and as whatsoever was for the poor interested Vincent, it is not surprising that he gave this new institute careful consideration. He was confessor, for years, to the Visitation nuns,<sup>86</sup> perfectly familiar with the change of plan which the public spirit of the country and the influence exerted upon the bishops by the Council of Trent had

<sup>85</sup> Bougaud, *History of St. V. de Paul*.

<sup>86</sup> Chosen for this by St. Francis, see Bougaud *St. V.*, p. 131.

brought to pass. But Vincent himself turned a deaf ear to the religious state. The constitutions which he drew up were a wonder to the world; yet it took him twenty long years to conquer public opinion, the objections of King and Parliaments, and the prudent hesitation of Pope and Cardinals. But the absolute necessity of service for the poor by sisters had at last become pressingly obvious, so he was determined that either his spiritual daughters should have no vows at all, or else, such as admitted of visiting the poor. The cloister was not what he wanted, any more than what Angela wanted or Mary Ward. Despite all opposition, he at last created the new type in an unchangeable form. He himself prescribed it: "The Sister of Charity shall have for her convent the house of the sick, for her cell the chamber of suffering, for her chapel the parish church, for her cloister the streets of the city, or the wards of a hospital. . . . Obedience shall be her enclosure, the fear of God her grate, and modesty her veil."<sup>87</sup>

To Vincent de Paul, then, it was given, after all, to cover in Paris the ground which Angela's Primitive Company might have taken care of; but Divine Providence had prepared the way, instead, for a new and immensely prolific development in the Company, for which the need at that time was almost equally imperative. We shall see on a future page how this new change accomplished the double aim which lay always at the bottom of Angela's mind, how it led to higher personal, spiritual development, and at the same time, fulfilled her ultimate purpose most happily, by shaping her Company into an institute devoted to specialization in the field of education alone. At this point, she appeared in the eyes of the world, at last, in actual fact, literally, a teacher of teachers.

Meanwhile, the Brescian centre had continued overflowing into the principal cities of Italy and southern France, which will be shown to have been affected in their turn by the new phase of development, until the crisis of the French Revolution brought all religious advance, except perhaps, martyrdom, to a standstill.

After the cataclysm had passed over, one by one the Monastic Orders gathered their veterans together for a new lease of life; and with these, in 1827, the Company of St. Ursula in Brescia drew

<sup>87</sup> Règles, Bougaud's *History of St. V. de Paul*, p. 214.



breath once more. But so uncertain was the prospect in Italy, that the bishop prevailed upon them for the time being, to adopt the life of the cloister, especially since several of the convents of the city had been permanently wiped out of existence;<sup>88</sup> hence, it was not until thirty years later, that the little Company, the life work of Angela, began its new career, under the régime of the Foundress' Primitive Rule. Countess Elisabetta Girelli and her sister, Maddalena, of happy memory,<sup>89</sup> revived the institute, had it newly approved, and lent to it the prestige of their personal sanctity; and it was the fruit of their work that was praised by Leo XIII, when in Brief of July 12, 1901, he said: "This institute is spread through Brescia, Milan, Bologna, Genoa, Rome and even into Africa and America. Everywhere, the daughters of St. Angela devote themselves to the teaching of Christian Doctrine, and preparing children for First Communion; they direct Sodalities of Children of Mary, schools, asylums, workmen's clubs; you find them at sick beds; they work to provide for poor churches, and diffuse good books among the people. In fine, by prayer and the example of an irreproachable life, these sisters often recall the erring from their ways, and gain for Christ, souls without number."<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, I, p. 337.

<sup>89</sup> Countess Girelli died in 1919, Maddalena in 1923. See Bertolotti, p. 210.

<sup>90</sup> Breve Pontificio di encomio e di dato conferma della Compagnia di S. Orsola secondo la sua primitiva istituzione, dato il 12 Luglio 1901. in Girelli's *Regola della Comp. di S. Orsola*, p. 102. 1903.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

#### I

FRANCES DE BERMOND has already appeared in this context as the earliest interpreter of Angela Merici, but the history and fortunes of that interpretation demand some inspection. When she and her sister companion went hastening to Paris in the windy March days of 1608, yielded up for the time being by their own reluctant community in the south, in response to the urgent call of Dr. Jacques Gallemant and the Lady de Sainte Beuve, little did Frances dream of what was going eventually to transpire in a quiet street of the gay capital, nor of the turn which the trend of Angela's idea as conceived by her was suddenly here to take.

As the very first Ursuline in France, Mlle. de Bermond had lived through all the earliest stages, in the development of the new institute. Having received the *Missio Canonica* from Clement VIII, in 1594,<sup>1</sup> she had led a consecrated life in the midst of the world, instructing children as the first Italian daughters of Angela had done. She had founded her little establishment of Primitive Ursulines at l'Isle near Avignon, in the diocese of Carpentras, basing their customs upon St. Charles' revision of Angela's *Rule*; and now, in Paris, there awaited her a group of girls for whom Mme. de Sainte Beuve had begged her "to establish in that city the constitutions of Milan which were being observed in southern France."<sup>2</sup> But the good Lady de Sainte Beuve left France, all unaware how, even at that early date, certain important persons were disturbed in mind lest these girls might run some risk exposed to the public as they were to be! So Mlle. de Bermond, full of zeal for her Primitive Ursulines, came riding into the great city that day, not indeed, on the little ass —

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Foix, *Vies des Premières Ursulines de France*, I, 75.

<sup>2</sup> *Annales de l'Ordre de Ste. Ursule*, I, 20.

her customary way of travelling — but swept along with the carriage and six of the grand ladies who had been sent to invite her, and blissfully unconscious that what she was destined there to provide a basis for would prove to be not at all Angela's Company of St. Ursula as she knew it, but a fresh and important historical development of that idea which would mean much to the future.

The close of the 16th and the opening of the 17th century presented a curiously vivid awakening here and there all through France, in small places especially, to a demand for the instruction of young girls. Perhaps it was due to the influence of the Council of Trent, perhaps it was the feeling of alarm arising from the Huguenot troubles, perhaps it was a late wave of Renaissance impetus; but in almost every one of what were to be the great Ursuline centres of the future, Paris, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Lyons, Dijon, Tulle, Arles, Avignon, and in every town within their circle of influence, like widening ripples upon water disturbed, the new life arose. Nor was it only in the Ursuline centres. The history of almost every Congregation that began in that epoch shows previous tentative efforts in dozens of French towns to relieve the demand, by small groups of women banding together in order to teach the children. It was the same identical need that was asserting itself in Italy and in England, the need for the continuance in the Church of the extra-institutional phase of her social service in response to the demands of Christian life; so that here, too, when ignorance and neglect began to yield soil to pernicious errors, the women of France seemed to spring to life as to a tocsin of alarm.

In many towns and villages little groups of young women, we are told, had already begun to teach girls and to devote their patrimony to the work. At Rennes two young girls took it up; <sup>3</sup> at Amiens,<sup>4</sup> it was two daughters of a municipal officer; at Eu six devout young women set to work in Angela's fashion, though they later became endowed by the Duchess of Guise. In Sainte Avoie there had already existed an ancient establishment of widows dating from the thirteenth century, who all along had been teaching girls. At Crêpy-in-Valois, eight women had been teaching for some time in a house of their own, under permission of the bishop. At Saint Omer twelve

<sup>3</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, II, p. 392.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

young ladies were at work. In the little village of Sallanches in the diocese of Geneva, St. Francis de Sales himself established the primitive Ursulines who subsequently adopted the grille. In Saugues near Puy — today, Department of Haute-Loire — four servant girls took up the life of the primitive Ursulines about the year 1610; for a dozen years, their work went on, finally withdrawing into cloister. From 1607 to 1618 a small group of Ursulines from Bordeaux lived in the primitive style in Bourg-sur-Mer, instructing young girls, servants, and poor people.<sup>5</sup>

Again, at Roman in Dauphiny, two young sisters, daughters of a rich merchant, adopted the habit with the white veil of Angela's sisters and opened free classes for children in their father's own house. The city of Valence had suffered under the Calvinistic troubles, and as early as 1601 the primitive Ursulines there began the work of angels of peace. For more than a quarter of a century they flourished, busily occupied, until in 1630, the question of Solemn Vows arose, "because on all sides the Order leaned towards it," when all the sisters but three withdrew from the place rather than give up their work under the primitive form. Thus it would seem, that the Primitive Company of St. Ursula had hardly a fair start in France when it was proposed to replace it by another form, itself to be transplanted later in other climes; — where, who shall say?

Similarly, in the little towns of Aumale, Senlis and Pontoise, Father Jacques Gallemant, struggling for years alone in his daily Catechism lesson, desperately trying to multiply himself as the work crowded in, had been inspired to organize just such bands of women workers, and from their ranks the impetus was finally carried to Paris. He was the spiritual director of Mme. Acarie, then one of the influential devout philanthropists of the city, whose chef d'oeuvre was the establishment of the Carmelites in France, among whom she herself in her widowhood attained finally to sanctity. Now, Mme. Acarie with her Carmelite postulants, had many whose health would not sustain the rigors of St. Teresa, and for whom she dreamed of opening an organized educational work, so she gave them her house, the Hotel St. Antoine in the Faubourg St. Jacques, and Father Gallemant, her director, sent to his old home at Pontoise

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 485.



for an experienced guide and leader, Nicole le Pelletier, whom he had himself trained as a teacher and catechist. They opened, at once, classes of free instruction which drew the attention of all fashionable Paris. At this moment, the necessary funds were accorded by Divine Providence through Mme. Acarie's cousin, Madeline L'Huil-lier, Comtesse de Sainte Beuve,<sup>6</sup> whose enthusiastic interest in the new project soon attracted to it all the first families of the city, the Marillacs, the Urfés, the Vieuxponts. They built two new houses, one for the sisters and one for the boarding school, besides the chapel; and the establishment eventually became the famous Ursuline convent of the Rue St. Jacques.

It was in this place, then, that Frances de Bermond hastened from Provence, at the call of Mme. de Sainte Beuve and the Archbishop of Paris. Here the simple hard-working sister, ardent, loving, untiring, who had made a success of the company of St. Ursula in the land of roses and Provençal song, was visited by Queens, Princes, and great ladies of the court, eager to acquaint themselves with Angela Merici's new mode of doing things.<sup>7</sup>

So for two years Frances de Bermond governed the Paris Ursulines,<sup>8</sup> greatly impressing Mme. de Ste. Beuve with the way she instilled into the sisters the spirit of Saint Angela. It was some time before Mme. de Ste. Beuve revealed either to her or to the sisters her secret intention to make the new establishment into something quite different from the Primitive Company of which Frances was the exponent. Mme. de Ste. Beuve wished to wait patiently until the new teaching spirit should have become so strong as not to suffer damage by being cast into new forms,<sup>9</sup> and thus Frances stamped permanently upon the Paris constitutions which were then in process of formation, her own peculiar impress, obtained through her contact with Milan, which strongly emphasized the reciprocal effect between the work of education and the personal sanctity of the Ursuline, "proposing this (education) for their principal aim," as she reiterated, "and deeming it the assured means of fulfilling their vocation."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For a delightful account of Madame de Sainte Beuve and Nicole le Pelletier, see *Court to Cloister*.

<sup>7</sup> Sainte-Foix, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Duderstadt, *History of the Constitutions*.

<sup>8</sup> 1608-1610, A.D.

<sup>10</sup> *Constitutions of Paris*, Part I, Chap. I.

The annals of the Paris Monastery lay stress upon the efficacious and enthusiastic conferences which Frances in those years gave to the community, which was hers for so brief a space.

Brief space indeed, for when at length Mme. de Ste. Beuve announced her intention of applying to Rome for permission to erect the institute into a Monastery of Solemn Vows, and a new page was opened in the development of Angela Merici's institute, the Ursulines of Provence were not slow to recall Frances de Bermond to their mother-house.

## II

The circle of Mme. de Ste. Beuve's friends belonged for the greater part to the intellectual élite of Paris and the highest dignitaries of the Church, who, at the startling news that flashed through the court concerning Mme. de Ste. Beuve's intention, now divided themselves into two camps, declared opponents, or friends, of the teaching sisters leading a cloistered life. One party advocated full monastic life for the Ursulines as a source of strength and a reward for their difficult vocation. The other held that teaching combined with monastic duties was entirely too difficult a task. They feared that the teaching would in time be relegated to a second place, as the experience of most of the old abbeys proved. Mme. de Ste. Beuve herself believed that the apostolic and the monastic life could be made not to hinder, but to encourage each other.

The Abbé Trou, biographer of Father Gallemant, explaining the point of view of the little group gathered around the new Ursulines — Cardinal de Bérulle, Mme. de Sainte Beuve, M. de Marillac, Mme. Acarie and Father Gallemant — regarding the beginnings in Paris of this great work of religious teaching, speaks as follows: "Grace like nature does not give rise to its works already perfected from the beginning. Thus, the Ursulines of Provence though living in community, had remained in the secular state and existed only in the form of a congregation without any vow.

"This state of affairs, on account of human inconstancy, promised no security, afforded no guarantee for the future; and the education of young girls remained always in the provisional stage of uncertainty.

"To end the just, legitimate and very natural apprehensions that might arise, they thought it necessary to regularize the new foundation of Paris, to erect it into a Religious Order and assure its stability by Solemn Vows."<sup>11</sup>

In this passage is clearly mirrored that peculiar point of view, the apprehensions, which feudal society held towards the social aspect of non-cloistral religious life.

And so, in 1610, Mme. de Sainte Beuve assembled a council of learned men, personal friends of herself and Mme. Acarie, to solve this unique problem; Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, Dr. Gallemant of the Sorbonne and Superior of the Carmelites, the Jesuit Fathers Coton, Goutéry and De la Tour, with the Feuilletonist Dom Eustache de St. Paul, besides M. de Marillac, Keeper of the King's Seal, who was lawyer to Mme. de Sainte Beuve and acted as judicial adviser, made up the council; while Mme. Acarie, later to be Beatified as the Carmelite Marie de l'Incarnation, was present at the council table with Mme. de Sainte Beuve. By this illustrious group was drawn up a plan of life to be submitted to Rome with a petition to erect a monastery, and M. de Marillac had Mme. de Sainte Beuve sign the papers to finance the new enterprise. . . .<sup>12</sup> To M. de Marillac and the Cardinal is owing the genesis of the Fourth Vow, the Vow of Instruction, which distinguishes the Ursulines of Paris; M. de Marillac as a Christian father and trained lawyer,<sup>13</sup> working to preserve in its integrity the end for which Angela established her Order, and which so deeply concerned the Christian family; and Cardinal de Bérulle, who took special joy in the proposed Vow of Instruction; for the Ursuline, in his eyes, was a mother who has to protect and nourish the spiritual, supernatural life issuing from the Baptismal font. Angela, who had predicted that she would be more alive after death than when actually with her daughters in the body, must have watched over the choice of these illustrious men to interpret her spirit and continue in her Order the Mother-Idea, with its program of fostering and directing. It was planned that the Ursulines should partake to a limited extent in the joys of liturgical

<sup>11</sup> Abbé Trou, *Vie de Jacques Gallemant*, pp. 185, 186.

<sup>12</sup> Trou, *op. cit.*, p. 183; Richelieu said of Marillac, "When others failed M. de Marillac always found a way." See *Court to Cloister*, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Duderstadt, *History of the Constitutions*, p. 6.

service, observing moderation in the practise of penance, while all through the scheme drawn up in this council there was emphasized a special concentration upon the obligation of the Vow of Teaching. M. de Marillac did much to train the sisters in the management of business and in the art of teaching, placing his own daughter in the school.

The Bull of Approbation was signed by Pope Paul V, on June 13, 1612, ordaining the observance of the Rule of St. Augustine in the new monastery of Paris, and closest accord with the decrees of the Council of Trent. It subjected the nuns to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris and, under him, to ecclesiastical superiors, following out the original idea of Angela Merici. It emphasized the principle that later lay at the base of the constitutions, namely, Angela's original conception of the education of girls; it directed the application of this principle in a fourth vow, the Vow of Instruction, insisting upon its fulfillment in preference to monastic observance, which likewise, was in harmony with Angela's mind. The Bull prescribed a broad-minded spirit and a watchfulness over liberty of conscience, and finally, word for word, the Bull repeated the privilege granted to Angela by Paul III, of changing the Rule according to circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

The Paris nuns were called the Great Ursulines, because of the Fourth Vow, which distinguished them from other branches. It is not difficult to believe that an institute opened under such a patronage was bound to evoke confidence and interest in the best families. In a short time, the community in Hotel Saint André became the asylum of all the young girls whose parents desired them removed from out the old tutorial or monastic jurisdiction and trained by the new Ursulines in the virtues and refinements that lie at the base of family life.<sup>15</sup> People of distinction also were interested. Père Coton, S.J., who tutored the Dauphin, came to inquire about Mère de Bermond's methods and borrow her books. The Dauphin himself attended Catechism once or twice and played bowls with the pupils. Even the young Queen, Marie de Medici, and the Queen Regent,

<sup>14</sup> Cf. McCafferty, *History of Catholic Church from Renaissance to Revolution*, Vol. I, pp. 238-239.

<sup>15</sup> Trou, *Life of Galleman*, p. 184.



Anne of Austria, often inspected this new experiment in social life, the observed of all observers of the time, and Mlle. de Montpensier, afterwards Duchess of Orléans, used to go to Hotel St. André three times a week for instructions.<sup>16</sup>

There were boarding pupils, and extern pupils who attended the day classes held in an adjoining building outside the cloister, while the poor came in great numbers to the Free Classes. Mme. de Maintenon in her girlhood was one of the six gratuitous pupils of the Rue St. Jacques. In those days poverty was no disgrace and the poor were not ashamed to ask their share of bread, material or intellectual, according to a long established system of Christian charity.<sup>17</sup>

### III

Pope Paul V had ordered that, before taking Solemn Vows, the Ursulines of Paris must make a year's novitiate under guidance of some experienced nuns of an Order standing in some special relation to theirs. Where was to be found such an Order? At length, they decided that with the Rule of St. Augustine as connecting link, the Augustinian Canonesses from the Abbey of St. Stephen in Soissons could fulfill this function, so four of these nuns came to Paris in 1612 to fill the principal offices of the community temporarily, and to introduce the new nuns to the monastic exercises and the traditions of convent life.<sup>18</sup> At the first formal Clothing, St. Martin's Day, 1612, the apparel of the Paris Ursulines was established, in a modification of the dress of the Augustinians and that of the Carmelites. The headdress of the Augustinians was adopted, with the leather cincture of the Hermits of St. Augustine, which the great Doctor himself was said to have worn; these with a black serge habit, gray skirt and sleeves, and a long black choir-mantle completed the costume. It was a unique ceremony, creating such interest that the little chapel could scarcely contain all the princesses and duchesses and dames of high degree! For a Primitive Ursuline from Provence had given the novices their remote preparation;

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *From Court to Cloister*, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> For interesting details of life in Rue St. Jacques in early days, see *From Court to Cloister*, Chap. VIII.

<sup>18</sup> *Annales*, Vol. I, p. 22.

Father Gallemant acted as Ecclesiastical Superior, assisting the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris in the tiny sanctuary; an Augustinian Abbess gave the veil; a Jesuit preached the sermon; and finally, Mme. Acarie, the future Carmelite, known to us as Blessed Mary of the Incarnation, helped serve in the kitchen for the repast to be set before the guests. Then too, Father Charles de la Tour, S.J., prepared these novices later for profession, by four weeks meditation on the Vows, which were followed by a fortnight under Father Gallemant devoted to consideration of Christ crucified, thus establishing the revered tradition of the Ursuline Profession Exercises.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, in the dispensation of Providence, the reaction toward cloister affected Angela's institute with a beneficial influence so that under pressure of what, at first glance, might seem the very antithesis of all her intentions, a new flash of genius appeared in her creative inspiration when a third branch burst into blossom upon the Brescian parent stem.<sup>20</sup> The glory of it was, that Angela's Company of St. Ursula was raised by the Church to the dignity of the great monastic Orders, while sacrificing none of its original vocation. It bore the unique stamp of being vowed specifically to instruction, and thus a new emphasis was laid upon her idea.

#### IV

When the Paris Ursulines had taken up monastic life, when all the Parisian ladies were flocking to the door in the Rue St. Jacques, when bishop was telling bishop of this new ecclesiastical family, the contagion spread like wildfire throughout France. Queen Marie de Medici, Regent, gave "brevet royal" November 12, 1612, authorizing the foundress to establish the Ursulines in Paris and the other cities of France,<sup>21</sup> and in five years more the Pope was asked to authorize the spread of the Paris monasteries, which he did by Bull in 1619.

Following upon this permission, one after another in a score of

<sup>19</sup> Duderstadt, *History of the Constitutions*.

<sup>20</sup> The Primitive Company; the Conventual Ursulines of St. Charles; the Monastic Ursulines of Paris.

<sup>21</sup> *Annales*, Vol. I, p. 21.

years, seven large monasteries were inaugurated,<sup>22</sup> each of which became the Mother-house of an innumerable progeny: Paris, of 16; Lyons, 13; Bordeaux, 16; Dijon, 24; Toulouse, 11; Tulle, 7; Arles, 5; Avignon, 15; and all of these produced derivative houses. Within a hundred years, there had been established in France alone three hundred and sixty Ursuline convents. The new institute bore the impress of French genius and was excellently adapted to the economic conditions of the country. Society declared it a success. The Ursulines count as one of their happiest records the eulogium pronounced upon their work by St. Vincent de Paul one day at St. Denys, when he was giving a conference to some ladies upon the proper method of rearing their children. He remarked that in most cases the ethical disorders into which children were falling might be attributed to their own parents, and that it was imperative that a remedy be found for so great a misfortune.

"I have discovered one," he added, "and so many other cities have derived good results from it, that I have not the slightest doubt you will try to obtain it for yourselves. It is to establish here a community of Ursulines like those Mme. de Sainte Beuve has founded in Paris. They are nuns who, besides giving instructions gratuitously, possess a piety that is solid, a method which is excellent, and above all an admirable system of *personal attention to their pupils*." <sup>23</sup>

Here the wise Vincent de Paul laid his finger upon the very heart of Angela's teaching idea!

"You could not do better," he went on, "than to bring here some of these teachers so useful for your little girls, and I will undertake to negotiate the affair with the foundress of that great monastery."

So, it was Mme. de Sainte Beuve herself, who brought to St. Denys in 1628, four of the Paris Ursulines, to fulfil the desired work.

<sup>22</sup> Bordeaux, 1618; Toulouse, 1615; Lyons, 1618; Dijon, 1619; Tulle, 1621; Arles, 1624; Avignon, 1632.

<sup>23</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, I, p. 401.

## V

Still it is significant, that while undoubtedly, the majority of the French Ursuline establishments which arose in course of time were foundations made by existing Ursuline monasteries, still a large number of the very earliest, particularly in the south of France, were formed from nuclei of Primitive Ursulines.

And, in tracing their rise, it is often hard to distinguish whether the demand of the French people gave the preference to the Primitive form or to the Monastic, so great was the enthusiasm for the Primitive, so glowing the reception given to the Monastic, and within so short a space of time. The original form had been familiar to the French public scarcely more than a decade of years, but its popularity was steadily on the increase, and when it adopted the cloistered form, the need for its work remained, a need which had to be supplied shortly by St. Vincent de Paul's institute and a dozen other congregations, many of them literal offshoots of the early Ursulines.

In this fact, once more, as has several times been pointed out, was manifested more strongly than ever, that current of life in Mother-Church which directs itself to social service outside and independent of the great ecclesiastical institutions devoted to the very same end, a vitality in the organism of the Church which it may be the mission of the twentieth century to behold in its fullest fruitage, and perhaps through Angela Merici. Who knows?

True to the spirit of the Council of Trent which had placed the responsibility directly in the hands of the bishop, the leaning towards cloister seems to have emanated strongly from the hierarchy.<sup>24</sup> We have seen that in Paris the new nuns had nothing at all to say in the construction of the institute, that the form had originated with Mme. de Sainte Beuve, who was convinced that there must be a way of bridging the chasm between an unprotected virginity and a stable educational system; and that this idea was promoted vigorously by Cardinal de Bérulle and the Jesuits, whose interest she had elicited.

"When their institute was elevated to the rank of the other Religious Orders," writes Abbé Trou,<sup>25</sup> "the Ursulines engaged the

<sup>24</sup> See Postel, Vols. I and II.

<sup>25</sup> Trou, *Life of Galleman*, p. 191.



confidence, the support and esteem of the heads of families, the clergy and all classes of society. Bishops began to ask for them." The fact was, that the sympathies of clergy and nobles were as usual, identical and conservative, and these favored the monastic, the ancient aristocratic form. For instance, it is said that in the city of Toulouse, so great was the opposition of the Parlement and the aristocracy to the Primitive Ursulines, that it was only with great difficulty the sisters could manage to begin work there; the Parlement forced them to stay in the suburbs of the city where they remained until adverse opinion could be counteracted.<sup>26</sup>

This feeling of the French people, especially those of the higher classes, for the new Monastic Institute, is shown in the welcome accorded them as they entered town after town; the enthusiasm is the same that was shown the Visitation after St. Frances de Sales consented to cloister them. At Tarascon for example, the citizens made the advance to secure Ursuline nuns from Arles, furnish the house for them with every necessary, and receive them in great festivity. Upon which Postel remarks<sup>27</sup> that receptions of this kind, of which there are many in the Ursuline Annals, will astonish our epoch, in which the alliance between the municipality and religion is absolutely unknown. The sisters came down the Rhone River by boat, and at landing were received by a society of matrons and young girls from the best families of the town; the magistrates were there in state and the Canons; the Ursulines were led in great rejoicing to the Church, where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed and where they had a great procession with the Te Deum, in which the nuns walked immediately after the canopy, each with a lighted candle, and the people of all classes thronged enthusiastically around them.

The *Chronicles* relate many other such incidents. They tell how the nuns of Arles came to St. Rémy on the Feast of St. Catherine amid the felicitations of the people, "who already recognized in them the benefactresses of their children."<sup>28</sup> At Argental, besides, the citizens themselves sent deputies to the Ursulines of Tulle to secure teachers for their schools. When the nuns from Tulle took possession of Ussel, in the diocese of Limoges, they arrived on Christ-

<sup>26</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, I, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 81, 82.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

mas Eve with a great concourse of clergy, magistrates and people.<sup>29</sup> And in many another town, too, the news of the coming of the Ursulines "was received with joy by the inhabitants."

## VI

At the same time, careful research reveals that the sisters whose original inspiration was to do the Primitive form of work, and whose success was constantly on the increase, were not always equally enthusiastic about the new movement towards cloister; some were very slow indeed to take it up. But the pressure of the age was upon them.

The records show, for example, that the monasteries of Toulouse<sup>30</sup> and Bordeaux<sup>31</sup> both began as Primitive Ursulines, the sisters teaching in Angela's fashion in both cities for eleven years before the change was made, when they caught the infection from Paris, and inclining toward retirement and contemplation, they finally adopted cloister. The Lyons Ursulines fell into the movement in the following way: Frances de Bermond, going home from Paris, in 1610, had stopped at Lyons, there to organize a Primitive Ursuline Establishment offered her, where, as the Annals declare, "not only were there many pupils but numbers of virtuous young women, who were attracted the more as there was question *neither of cloister nor solemn vows*."<sup>32</sup> In 1618, however, the same Archbishop of Lyons, Denys de Marquemont, whose controversy with St. Francis de Sales had ended in cloistering the Visitation Order, proposed the same programme to Mlle. de Bermond's Ursulines in Lyons, who, to the consternation of their Provençal Mother-house, adopted now the monastic form.

Françoise de Xainctonge at Dijon had thought only of following the *Primitive Rule* of Angela at Brescia.<sup>33</sup> The suggestion of monastic erection came to her community from the bishop, not perhaps without the influence of Mme. Acarie, who was interested in the Carmel at Dijon and was a benefactress of the Ursulines. Mlle. de Xainctonge was very slow indeed to take up the propo-

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> 1604-1615; Postel, II, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> 1606-1617; Postel, II, 481.

<sup>32</sup> Postel, Vol. I, pp. 435, 436.

<sup>33</sup> Postel, Vol. II, p. 8.

sition. She was two years deciding.<sup>34</sup> However, a Chapter General and a conference of eight theologians clinched the matter; the nuns then accepted unanimously. Again, in another case: Antoinette Micolon,<sup>35</sup> in 1614, opened an Institute of Ursulines at Ambert,<sup>36</sup> after studying the methods of the Primitive Ursulines at Puy for four months but the doubts and uncertainties of remaining without approbation from Rome, together with various other complications, finally drove her to obtain security for her community in monasticism under Bull of 1621. At Arles it was a priest,<sup>37</sup> the brother of Jeanne de Rampalle, who urged the assumption of the monastic vows by the Ursulines, although his mother herself had joined the uncloistered Ursulines in Avignon, and Jeanne, brought up among the Primitive sisters, had intended her establishment to be of that form. Once more, a nun who was trained by Mère de Luynes, said to have been a pupil of Frances de Bermond, was responsible for the transformation of the Ursulines at Avignon, although, as Postel reminds us, "Angela had opposed the idea of cloister at the beginning."<sup>38</sup>

When the Pope in 1617 authorized all the archbishops and bishops of France to erect Ursuline monasteries in their dioceses, there arose the question of government. And again in Paris, as once in upper Italy, opinion was divided. Would it be well to set all Ursulines under a Superior General, or should each house remain autonomous, under the jurisdiction of the bishop? The Jesuits inclined to advise the former; it seemed to them necessary to have unity of direction in order to conserve unity of spirit. Certain persons of the court approached Mme. de Villiers St. Paul to induce her to assume the title of General of the Ursulines, but she would pretend to no such dignity. Cardinal de Bérulle and M. de Marillac, supported by St. Francis de Sales, were in favor of autonomy to safeguard liberty of spirit. However, at this time the publication of a life of St. Charles Borromeo turned the scale in favor of autonomy.

The French Ursulines then, continuing in this form had, before

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, II, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55-56.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>38</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 88.

the middle of the next century, founded thirty-eight houses, while many others of the primitive form had taken up the Paris constitutions, among whom was Maçon, whence all German Ursuline convents of Paris root derived their origin.

There remained, however, a certain slight bond amongst them: it was partly for unity, partly for concentration upon Angela's educational purpose, that the houses remained in touch although autonomous. Occasionally, the different houses desired a common Superior, and this fact has preserved for us an interesting relic in the proceedings for the election of a Superior which may be found in certain ancient editions of the *Paris Regulations*.<sup>39</sup> It runs as follows: "When Several Monasteries of the same city or diocese unite in the Election of Superior or Visitor." "Some weeks before election, the Superioresses of each monastery confer with their Discreets and decide upon the choice of four persons. Then before submitting the matter to the chapters the several houses confer by letter, telling the names and how chosen, and they all agree upon four out of the entire list. The number of vocals in each chapter must be made the same, conforming themselves to the community who have the fewest, by dropping out the younger ones who may be present but do not vote. The monasteries then decide upon the one who is to open the suffrage boxes. The first house votes, the boxes are sealed in presence of chapter, and wrapped up, and are given to the confessor or the sacristan or another trustworthy person, who carries them to the next house, where they are unsealed, but not opened, in the presence of the chapter, resealed and sent by the confessor to the next; and he is witness at the opening. If the boxes arrive late, they are kept in the archives all night under key, and the chapter votes next day. In the last house, the one who is to preside at the election, comes, and they finish according to the constitution."

The plan of union among the houses was first advocated about the year 1621 by Mère Colombe de S. Esprit, Antoinette Micolon, who obtained the monastic Bull for the Ursulines of Tulle. She conceived the idea of uniting all the French and Italian congregations and suggested a general code to be approved by the Holy See. She wrote to a number of houses and received from the Superiors, as

<sup>39</sup> *Paris Regulations*, Vol. III, Chap. I, Sec. 2, ed. of 1705.



Postel<sup>40</sup> adroitly remarks, "compliments upon her good will!" Each house was too attached to its own customs to abandon them. With this the matter ended. Sixty-two years later, when Venerable Mary of the Incarnation had her convent in Quebec affiliated with the Ursulines of Paris, the question once more arose of a general union of all the congregations of Ursulines, but the efforts were once more too isolated to come to any notable result.

It was left to the nineteenth century with its growing passion for consolidation and centralization, to witness the great gathering into groups of Angela's Company of St. Ursula, with a Roman union, a German federation, a Polish union, several small Belgian unions, besides lesser groups.<sup>41</sup>

Such in general, was the development of the Ursuline history in France. The lineage of nearly all Ursuline Communities in the world today may be traced by genealogy back to some one of these large French congregations.

## VII

From France Angela's Company began, in its monastic form, to spread abroad and over seas. Belgium, the Netherlands, so closely associated with French history during the seventeenth century, was quick to take up the new form of Angela's institute. In Germany, too, the movement was developing. To the quaint old town of Aachen, the daughters of Angela found their way as early as 1651 and to ancient Cologne where, in 922, there had existed, on the soil watered by the blood of Ursula's band of martyrs, a community of simple vows under title of the "Vierges de Ste. Ursule," without, however, the apostolic institute of Angela. When the Brescian movement was reported to these sisters in 1603, the Vierges de Ste. Ursule enthusiastically sent to the Ursulines at Brescia some precious relics of their patronal heritage, the heads of two of St. Ursula's martyrs. In 1913 this Ursuline community, large and flourishing, was conducting a college for women at Cologne, equipped with every modern

<sup>40</sup> Vol. II, p. 61. The bishops themselves had discussed the matter of union in the general assembly of French Clergy, 1645. Postel, *op. cit.*, II, p. 239.

<sup>41</sup> The Roman union, in 1922, aggregated 190 houses; the German confederation centered at Ahrweiler, 9 houses; and the Polish group comprised 6 communities.

convenience. Throughout Germany and Austria, the Ursuline Order, in its monastic form, spread from the various Mother-houses of France, until England, Ireland, Poland, Greece, all became honey-combed by the new workers.<sup>42</sup>

And then, over seas!

The first nuns which the wild forests of America ever beheld were a little group of Ursulines who, in 1639, began the famous Ursuline monastery of Quebec. Angela's Company had crossed the waters. Four years after the death of Champlain and only thirty-one after the city of Quebec was established, Marie Guyard de l'Incarnation with her band came from Tours, "the Teresa of her time and of the New World," so Bossuet called her.

The chronicles of the order give fleeting glimpses of these Ursulines in the huts of the Indians. The sisters did not ask if the children were clean or dirty, and did not wait to be told whether or not it were the custom of the land; not a little Indian girl but was embraced so sweetly that the poor creatures were astonished and touched.<sup>43</sup>

"We had to study the language of the Indians," wrote Mary of the Incarnation to her brother, "but as it was twenty years since I had been occupied in studies, the learning of a tongue so different from ours fatigued me much. The nouns and the verbs that I learned by heart seemed so many marbles rolling around in my head."

Yet this was the daughter of Angela, destined to live to compose dictionaries in Algonquin and Iroquois! Her monastery endured the siege of Quebec by Phipps in 1690 and by Wolfe, 1759, after which battle Montcalm was carried at midnight and given a hero's grave under the floor in the little chapel of the Ursulines. The nuns taught Indians, French, English, Scotch, Irish and American girls, and today appended to the history of their institution is a long list of the names of pupils proud to have studied there in the days of Marie Guyard de l'Incarnation, who like a third Angela, turned aside from the cloister to gather the poor at her knee.

What saint ever had among her laurels the Indian trophy of which this champion of the Company of St. Ursula can boast?

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Postel, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Richaudeau, *Life of Mary of the Incarnation*, p. 183.

When Mother Mary of the Incarnation's cause of Beatification was introduced at Rome, the gentle nun had the distinction of having eight Indian chiefs of the Huron tribe sign a petition to the Holy Father that she might be canonized. They voiced the desire of hundreds of braves who venerated her name, the Algonquins, the Hurons, the Iroquois:

"Holy Father, Rev. Mère Marie de l'Incarnation called us out of our forests to teach us to know and adore the true Master of life; . . . with her own hand she made on our hearts the sign of faith and that faith is still engraven within them. . .

"Our nation, once so great, is about to disappear from the earth. . . . Holy Father, with the last wish and the last sigh of the Huron tribe we beg you to receive the testimony of our deep gratitude and veneration for her. The bones of our forefathers will tremble in the grave if your voice proclaims the canonization of our Mother."<sup>44</sup>

The results of the labors among the Indians were great indeed, giving to them the knowledge of God; all over the continent the Indian races have been found more accessible to Christianity as a result of the first teachings they received.<sup>45</sup> True, the Ursulines did not succeed in creating young ladies out of the strong, lithe Indian girls, but they sought not to unfit them for that to which nature had formed them; and the verdict of Mary of the Incarnation after thirty-three years of work among the Indians, has now been verified by two hundred years of time: "We have more experience on this head than any one else," she wrote: "and we readily acknowledge that of the great number we have instructed we have hardly civilized one in a hundred. They must see the woods, must follow their parents to the chase! They prefer the wigwam to our fine houses; it is the nature of the Indian."

In Christianity alone, she found the Indian, the Iroquois, Algonquin, Abenake, Montagnai, capable of progress and of a high degree of moral excellence. Devoted to the end, she wrote in one of her very last letters: "We would not exchange them for all the kingdoms of the earth!"

And thus from Boston to New Orleans, from Havana to British

<sup>44</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 207, 208.

<sup>45</sup> *Glimpses of the Monastery*, p. 92.

Guiana, the Order spread, adapting itself everywhere to new circumstances in accord with the Foundress' bidding, until even far Alaska had its St. Michael's-by-the-Sea. Postel claims that no other religious Order presented such a growth.<sup>46</sup> At the outbreak of the French Revolution there were about nine thousand Ursulines in France alone, in three hundred and fifty monasteries, teaching every class of Society.<sup>47</sup>

"Oh, that all the world might come under the shadow of this *Rule!*" Angela had once exclaimed.

The number of children educated by these women was enormous. Even their enemies acknowledged this, for in the Legislative Assembly, Good Friday, 1792, when the law of monastic suppression was under fire, Lecoz objected in vain that it would deprive six hundred thousand children of means to learn how to read and write.<sup>48</sup> But the Ursulines with the rest were swept to the guillotine or to deportation by an absurd philosophy which dubbed them fanatics and victims of superstition. The world beheld once more another Agnes, another Cecilia, when instead of offering incense to false gods, these were called upon to take the Oath that violated their conscience as Catholics.<sup>49</sup>

"I cannot save my life at the expense of my faith," said the Ursuline, true daughter of St. Ursula, victim of the Huns.

Sister Clotilde Paillot of Valenciennes wrote her last letter from prison October 19, 1794:

"This is the last time Clotilde will write to you . . . five of us are no more. . . . They did not walk to the guillotine, they flew. . . . Pray for Clotilde but do not pity her. Never in her life has she been so happy as now when she is to shed her blood for her religion. Perhaps she will be gone before you receive this letter, Adieu."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Vol. II, p. 282.

<sup>47</sup> *Annales*, Vol. I, p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Postel, II, p. 283.

<sup>49</sup> The Oath of Allegiance to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy.

<sup>50</sup> *Annales*, Vol. I, p. 61.



## VIII

But there is yet another aspect of the story. The primitive Company in France having resolved itself entirely into the Monastic, the work which would have been theirs fell to certain offshoots of the Ursuline Order, with great success. Providence carried the non-cloistered education of Angela into many and far fields.

One of these, the Ursulines of Jesus and Mary, with a centre at Malet<sup>51</sup> have more than thirty houses following the Primitive Rule of Angela in a modified form; their work consists notably in conducting country schools; they are a bevy of themselves under a Mother-General. At Pons the same idea governs another group similarly adapted. Ursulines of Jesus and Mary with an adaptation of the Constitutions of Bordeaux, have an illustrious centre at Thil-donck<sup>52</sup> in Belgium with a union of their own and branches as far away as in England. The Directress of the Schools brings the children across the channel and conducts them home again.

At Chavannes, the Ursulines of Jesus,<sup>53</sup> another of the off-shoots, received government authority in 1826; they do a great work and like the Primitive Company are not cloistered. In the diocese of La Rochelle, the Ursulines of the Sacred Heart use Angela's original idea in a nursing and teaching Order, founded in 1807. Still another teaching Order was founded about 1700 at Moissy l'Évêque and under the name of Ursulines of Christian Teaching,<sup>54</sup> take us back in memory to St. Charles and his splendid schools of Christian Doctrine, the flower of his age.

The Sisters of St. Ursula of the Blessed Virgin at Dôle, 1606, founded by Anne de Xainctonge, elder sister of Françoise, foundress of the Ursulines of Dijon, did not adopt Angela's Rule; their affinity to Angela is in using her primitive idea and ranging themselves under St. Ursula. They follow a Rule that is Ignatian in Spirit.<sup>55</sup>

## IX

Angela's heart would have been delighted could she have foreseen the multiplicity of educational works which her daughters took up

<sup>51</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, II, 522.

<sup>53</sup> *Cath. Encyc.* IX, p. 413.

<sup>55</sup> *Idem*, XV, p. 288.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>54</sup> *Idem*, XV, 68.

in the course of time. The great French monasteries had boarders and semi-boarders, day schools and poor schools, and in these some interesting devices developed themselves. In the *Annals of the Ursulines of Nice* is found an institution called the Patronage: the richer pupils of the boarding school were encouraged each one to adopt one of the little ones of the poor school as protégée, help her to get clothing, take interest in her progress in school, and become a little mother to her.<sup>56</sup> A delicate tenderness was thus inspired, kindness of heart developed in the one, respect and gratitude in the other. Also, on Sundays, the school rooms of the Free Classes were thrown open to pupils old and new, for recreation and a little religious inspiration. They could attend the Vespers and Benediction in the chapel, they could receive a word of advice from old teachers, and in the evening, before breaking up, there were distributed little certificates of regular attendance and some souvenirs.

At Auch, they formed in the school a Literary Circle composed of the most successful pupils in each grade; these had places of distinction at every social function: they were often appointed judges, together with the teachers, of the composition and reading classes throughout the year. At the end they received as reward the flower of their class, rose, camellia, lily, jasmine, or violet, — a flower for each class, — the association bearing the graceful title of Couronne de Marie. At Auch, the nuns themselves attained to a scholarly distinction, publishing a *History of France*, a *History of the Church*, an *Histoire Littéraire*, and some other works, including a three-volume *Anthology of Verse*.<sup>57</sup> Nice had the further credit of founding an Association of Christian Mothers, called the Arch-Confraternity of St. Angela, which met every first Saturday of the month, and for which the Ursulines of Blois, later, secured canonical erection. The members watched over the pupils of the Boarding School and were spiritually reinvigorated by contact with their Alma Mater.<sup>58</sup>

The women of Toulouse, similarly, leagued with their Alma Mater. The Ursulines organized there an association of secular

<sup>56</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 416, 417.

<sup>57</sup> *Idem*, II, 511, 512.

<sup>58</sup> *Idem*, II, 417.

ladies with elective officers and under a nun directress. These ladies bound themselves to certain slight religious practices and undertook charitable works, visiting hospitals and prisons, instructing servants and the wives and daughters of laboring men.<sup>59</sup>

In some of the richer establishments of the Congregation of Bordeaux, too, before the French Revolution, they had an institute of secular women who lived within the Monastic enclosure but apart from the cloister; they were approved by the Bishop under special statutes of their own, and after a probation of three months, received as insignia a black woollen girdle.<sup>60</sup> Subordinate to the Mother Superior and directed in their assemblies by one of the nuns, they carried on works of charity, such as securing spiritual aid for prisoners, the sick, and the helpless poor.

A score of other projects were inaugurated whose success proved how well the monastic status of the nuns was adapted to those centuries before the Revolution, and with what freedom the cloistered nuns could carry out their work, which certainly could not be done today. Some Ursulines opened houses of refuge; some had flourishing normal schools; at Montpezat classes were held after school hours to teach little boys their Catechism and their prayers. Many a vocation germinated in these classes.<sup>61</sup> At Pau,<sup>62</sup> besides their beautiful convent school, the nuns conducted an orphanage for twenty children on the outskirts of the town. At Aire-sur-l'Adour the Ursulines,<sup>63</sup> by special ecclesiastical permission, held Catechism classes for country girls throughout the week in the manner of the Primitive Institute, with Sunday teaching for girls and women at the parish church. It was the Ursulines of St. Jacques in Paris who instituted what has ever since been known as the "Fête of First Communion," reviving the traditions of the early Church, dressing the children in white and making a great day of this event.<sup>64</sup>

Some of the rulers of Europe perceived what these women were doing for their people. When Joseph II of Austria, whom Frederick the Great wittily called "my brother the Sacristan," found his religious workers "unpractical," and even prohibited coffins in order

<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, II, 40.

<sup>60</sup> *Idem*, I, 528.

<sup>61</sup> *Idem*, II, 522.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *Court to Cloister*, pp. 103-104.

to save the forests,<sup>65</sup> the Ursulines were among the few religious Orders that he exempted from suppression in his dominions. Again, in 1751, the King of Portugal hearing of the work done in his Brazilian colonies by the little group of Ursulines there decreed that the Ursulines alone should have charge of the educational works in Brazil.<sup>66</sup>

## X

The French Revolution caused a lamentable break in this, as in every other enterprise of European society. Until the nineteenth century the Holy See had not recognized any other than papal enclosure with Solemn Vows; but after the Revolution had left its destructive mark upon the religious communities, despoiling them of liberty and even life, the civil law, under influence of the Code Napoléon and his Organic Laws, took a radical turn, so that the Holy See was obliged to permit the nuns to continue their religious life as best they could, observing only such enclosure as the bishop of the diocese imposed upon them.<sup>67</sup>

In consequence, the Ursulines of France emerged after 1815 as a Roman-approved Congregation with the statutes of the ancient monasticism, but with only episcopal and partial enclosure, and this established upon the basis of their original Bulls, all of which state and reiterate that peculiar privilege of elasticity abiding in the institute of Angela Merici, and forming so fundamental a part of her teaching idea, namely, the power to alter, change and to make new statutes, not contrary to the Apostolic canons nor the Tridentine decrees, but approved simply by the Ordinary.<sup>68</sup>

This same status has affected the offshoots of the French Ursuline monasteries in other countries, who are under the same Bulls of approval. The ravages of the French Revolution had a decided influence in determining the Church to change her policy towards monastic institutes, the rather, as the attitude of the laboring classes was completely altered. Socialism with its demands for equalization

<sup>65</sup> Guggenberger, *History of the Christian Era*, Vol. III, p. 112.

<sup>66</sup> Postel, *op. cit.*, II, 273.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Schaaf, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>68</sup> Bull of Paul III, 1544, to the Bishop of Brescia; Bull of Paul IV, 1612, to the Archbishop of Paris; Bull of Paul V, 1618, to the Archbishop of Bordeaux.



made people ashamed to be poor. No longer were they so proud to be ranged in the Poor Schools of the Ursulines. The point of view was changed, so that Post-Tridentine Popes tolerated community life for certain Tertiaries without Solemn Vows or strict enclosure, approving their constitutions, while carefully refraining from bestowing canonical sanction upon their institutes, which "were to be left entirely subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary of the place;"<sup>69</sup> still, "with the passing of strict enclosure," says Schaaf, "from convents of nuns who no longer made Solemn Vows, there was removed the one greatest obstacle that had existed to the approval of many new congregations, whose purpose was to bring alleviation to society, and to instruct the rising generation."<sup>70</sup> Thus, in matters of cloister, no new law was laid down by the church; the bishop or the constitutions continued to govern the cloister regulations. Leo XIII in his *Conditae a Cristo* 1900, and the *Normae* of 1901, adhered to these principles.<sup>71</sup> But now the new Code of Canon Law (1918) binds all religious to modified cloister, regardless of their approval being episcopal or papal, even those whose members normally take Solemn Vows, but for special reasons make only Simple Profession, under which category fall the Ursulines. As late as July 5, 1923, these were, by decree, declared true Nuns by Pontifical Right, subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries and free to retain their present status or to reassume the form of their original Bull, provided they obtain such permission from the Holy See.

Consequently, the three historical forms of Angela's institute go on today in their respective tenors: the Primitive Company of St. Ursula, the Conventualized Ursulines of St. Charles' time, and the Ursuline Nuns, properly so-called, professed under Simple Vows, and observing partial, episcopal enclosure.<sup>72</sup>

Many were the noble endeavors which the French Revolution suppressed, but the Ursulines, trained to the Christian virtues of meekness and forbearance, desisted from their labors until Provi-

<sup>69</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, July, 1923, p. 357.

<sup>70</sup> Schaaf, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>71</sup> *Idem*, p. 155.

<sup>72</sup> To these may be added certain monasteries in Germany and elsewhere, which, undisturbed by the upheaval of 1789, retained Papal enclosure, and others where it was restored in course of time, under Indult of special privilege.

dence set their hand to the wheel again, their resourcefulness enriched by suffering, their spirit undaunted. Today they are again leaders in the movement, this time for the higher education of women. The idea of Angela Merici seems to be ever taking on fresh significance, ever exerting itself in new applications.

"Be assured that your association is the work of His Hand, and that He will never abandon it as long as the world lasts. If He established it, who can destroy it? I know what I am saying."<sup>73</sup> These were her words.

Nowadays Angela's daughters are numbered by thousands. A survey of the institute for the year 1900, made in the field of the monastic branch alone, covered six hundred establishments, which at the low figure of twenty members each, — truly, a *reductio ad absurdum*, — would mean twelve thousand Ursulines; and again computing a minimum of the thirty pupils to each teacher which modern educators are prescribing, would show that in the one year 1900, three hundred and sixty thousand children at least were being taught by Angela's daughters in one single branch of her threefold institute. Statistics are not available to estimate what is being accomplished by the uncloistered branches, but these are scattered all through Italy and other districts of Europe, popularly known as the Angelines. Every state of Europe has hundreds of Ursulines today; they are in the islands of the Greek archipelago, in the East Indies, Australia, China and the Transvaal; they are working all over the United States and Alaska, in Canada and Brazil. Everywhere you will find them.

Their impress upon modern education is unmistakable. It would be difficult to find any kind of educational endeavor that they have not put hand to.

However, Angela's Teaching Idea still lives in them. Always they maintain the Mother-Idea which she bequeathed them. There is in their schools everywhere a home-atmosphere that is their distinguishing mark, and which leaves a positive and yet a peculiarly indefinable stamp upon their pupils. Their product is eminently women-of-the-home.

Angela's movement historically led the way in work for girls'

<sup>73</sup> Testament, 11th Bequest, Spirit of St. Angela, p. 59.

education. No organized institute for this purpose existed before hers, either among secular women or religious. But within the span of a century, half a dozen other new and flourishing institutes sprang up in its wake, so that today they are as an intricate network spread over the globe. Still, none of these devote themselves by special vow to the instruction of young girls as do her daughters. Nor do any of these, splendid and strongly-marked societies that they are, possess exactly the characteristics or the distinctive spirit of her daughters. Thus she proves herself more alive than when she lived among them, just as she predicted. In all these other organizations, however, may be traced her impelling influence. Angela Merici blazed the trail.

True once more to her original intentions, it is the pride of her successors today as ever, to lend themselves to those forms of education demanded by the present age, be it college, settlement-work, State, parochial, or private school, missionary work or even day-nursery; they are ready for anything. In one diocese alone in the United States, the Ursulines have under their care upwards of twelve thousand children, and these are being taught without any charge whatever to the State. Thus, the Company of St. Ursula still retains its initial vigor and the ideal which prompted its inception in 1534 in Brescia.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### URSULINE METHODS OF TEACHING IN THE 17TH CENTURY

#### I

BUT as to the methods of teaching adopted by the French Ursulines, the methods which Frances de Bermond brought to Paris and which elicited such admiration in high circles, what were they? What was this novel scheme that attracted savants to visit the little school in the Rue St. Jacques to observe Mlle. de Bermond at her classes and examine the books she was using?

The earliest existing printed edition of the Ursuline pedagogical scheme, the first complete development of Angela Merici's *Rule and Teaching Idea*, saw the light in the printing shop of Louis Josse at the Sign of the Crown of Thorns, Rue St. Jacques, in 1705. It contained the following Approbation of Superiors:<sup>1</sup>

"We, Superior of the two monasteries of the Ursulines of Paris, having examined carefully the book containing regulations observed by said nuns in teaching little girls, boarders and externs, judge it apropos, and permit that it be printed, so as to be more easily communicated to the houses of the same Order who wish to make use of it as a *method very important* in the *Christian and secular education* of the *children* in their institutes.

(Signed) FERET, V. Gen'l.

Paris, March 4, 1652 "

Probably, this latter was the original date of printing the *Regulations* of the Girls' School, just forty years after Rome had approved the erection of the monastery of the Ursulines in the Rue St. Jacques, and hence the actual teaching methods are almost cer-

<sup>1</sup> *Règlements des Religieuses Ursulines de la Congregation de Paris*; divisez en trois livres. Paris, chez Louis Josse, Rue St. Jacques, à la Couronne d'Épines, 1705.



tainly those which Frances de Bermond brought with her, and which the Paris Ursulines practised from the first decade of the 17th century; but even if this were not the case, even if the entire system sprung from her original program were the work of the generation that succeeded her, the scheme of education formulated in these pages is astonishingly enlightened for the age, and it bears growing interest as it develops chapter by chapter.

This method was brought to America as early as 1727 by a band of courageous Ursulines from France, who braved a perilous six months' voyage to New Orleans to teach the little French girls of the colony there. And about a dozen Ursuline institutes in the United States established from various monasteries in France, to-day treasure this little book of *Regulations*, maintaining still a pedagogical tradition based originally upon it.<sup>2</sup>

The scheme as laid out in the book printed in 1652 embraces a Boarding School and a Day School for girls. The organization of the two establishments as required by that year was quite divergent, on account of the prevailing class distinctions, but in general management the two followed similar lines and the teaching technique was, of course, identical in the two schools. There was no connection between the two, the latter being conducted in a building apart, though so close to the Boarding School that the nuns did not have to go out in order to enter the Extern class rooms.

As the Extern or Day School seems in the light of history the more interesting, its features demand investigation first.

## II

School Management in the Day School had been carefully planned, as is clear. At the head of the school was a Supervisor or Mistress General as she was called, who was free from the labor of the class room so as to devote her entire time and thought to supervision. She it was who kept the balance between teacher and teacher, and pupil and pupil; it was her duty to provide all school supplies, whether for teacher or pupil; she was responsible for

<sup>2</sup> See J. A. Burns, C.S.C., *Principles, Origin and Establishment of the Catholic School System in the United States*. New York, 1912, pp. 66-84.

daily attendance, for classification, and for promotions, for rewards and penalties. Hers was the responsibility of seeing that the children were properly trained and that they received the Sacraments, her duties in this matter being fully outlined in no less than twenty-seven Articles of Chapter Two.

Under the Mistress General or Supervisor were the Class Mistresses, two in number, who replaced each other in principal charge every other week, acting on alternate weeks as assistant each to each. Their duty was to stand responsible for order and discipline, to attend to the spiritual education of the pupils and their growth in Christian virtue, and especially to teach Catechism and instruct the pupils in their religion. Collaborating with these were the special teachers, one for reading, one for arithmetic, if possible one for writing, and one for needlework. Since the instruction was largely individual or in very small groups, these duties filled the entire time of the teachers, and the economy of the class work was curiously like the very latest feature devised in the American plan, namely, the Platoon System, inasmuch as both time and space were utilized, so that while school hours were short, every teacher and every pupil had definite tasks at every moment, and every class room was occupied. The system comprised the interesting feature known as the Pupil-Teacher. As children attended the Extern School in large numbers, each class was divided off into bands of ten watched over by a Pupil-Teacher called the "Dixainière," usually a girl distinguished in her class for scholarship and school spirit, who held the position for two or three months at a time. The Dixainière was a much-envied young lady, who enjoyed the confidence of the authorities, receiving special training for her position; and at the end of her term she was awarded some mark of recognition for her services in the shape of a trifling prize, and was sometimes retained in her post. It was the duty of the Dixainière<sup>3</sup> to assist in hearing the Catechism lesson and drilling the pupils, to take care of and distribute the school books, which were never carried away from school, to marshall the ranks in groups of ten, one Dixainière to each group, reporting all misdemeanors, and the like. She was to keep account of the children, noting all disputes

<sup>3</sup> *Règlements*, Part II, Chap. V, Art. 3.

or any tearing of clothes, or playing naughty games, or with boys, striking one another or running in the streets as they came along to school, or being noisy in the school hall or disorderly in rank. In short, she might, with impunity, consider herself a very important personage.

### III

The order of the day in the Day School was marked by regularity. To one who studies the primitive book of the *Règlements*, the school ménage bears the same delightful touch of quaintness which one sees in old French engravings of the village school, excepting that whereas the latter's dominant note is confusion, the dominant tone here is order. Order!

Conceive a large room, a species of reception hall, in which the day-scholars assemble of a morning, and where the prevailing feature is the big school-bell watched furtively by every eye.<sup>4</sup> At the door they are met regularly by the Mistress General (Supervisor), whose duty it is to guard the door lest undesirable people force entrance, and to keep order, sometimes with the assistance of an older pupil who acts as monitor.<sup>5</sup> A little later, however, she may open the street door a second time, so as to obviate the difficulty of any children who happen to be late hanging around the street. In bad weather she opens more promptly and when the days grow shorter she dismisses the pupils a little earlier. She keeps a register of them all, with their street addresses and the class and standing of their parents. The street door opens a quarter of an hour before lessons begin, so the children upon arrival must each go to her own appointed place in the school hall, and spend the interval eating her breakfast (*déjeuner*) out of her seventeenth century kit, presumably, or else studying her prayers or her catechism.

Suddenly, the bell rings, the class door opens. Two by two they all march in, each class separately, divided off into groups of five couples, with the Dixainière of each group walking behind; they are in silence, and as they pass, they curtsy to the nuns who open the door. Every class enters its own room, curtsies to the Class

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. I, Art. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Part I, Chap. II, Art. 3, 4.

Mistress, and each child sits down in her respective place on the bench.<sup>6</sup>

There are no very small children among them, as day pupils are not allowed to be received until they know their letters and can assemble them, although occasionally an older girl who does not know them is received, in order to be trained in her religion. In the class room is some religious picture or statue, and the opening exercise of the day is morning prayer, the older girls taking turn about in leading. Then all rise, curtsy once more to the teacher and sit down upon their benches. The Class Mistress must manage with discretion so that children of better condition will not be sitting too near those who are neglected, or who are not well kept and clean, for fear of arousing disgust; nor yet must the poor be made to feel any distinction; for the teachers are enjoined to show to all an equal care and an equal affection.<sup>7</sup>

The morning session lasts an hour and a half. The Dixainière gives each of her group a book for the Reading Lesson, as it is her business to keep the books in a class-room cupboard under lock and key. The Reading Lesson begins. They all follow on the book until after they have had their turn at reading and then they may study their arithmetic, or perhaps they may do manual work, sewing, sitting quietly in their places. In groups, they are called out of the room by the writing teacher: they rise, curtsy to the Class Mistress, and are led in rank to the writing room by the Mistress General. Here they have teaching for an hour . . . arduous task! . . . and with the same ceremony return to the place on the bench in the other room to continue their reading. At noon the pupils are dismissed and the school door is closed.

After the recess they assemble as before. They go to their places, kneel down and recite the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. Next, comes Catechism lesson. If the children have questions to propose they may ask them one by one, not talking two or three at once. At this lesson the Dixainière takes her place standing near the Class Mistress, to question the members of her band, after which she must take her own rank in the class.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Part II, Chap. V, Sec. II.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Chap. III, Art. 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Chap. V, Sec. II, Art. 13.



This lesson being over, the Dixainière gives out the books as she did in the morning, and there is the second lesson in reading. During this session different bands are called out for the arithmetic lesson in another room, as they were for writing in the morning.<sup>9</sup>

At the close of the day's session, a quarter of an hour is devoted to Examen of Conscience. Special stress is laid upon all religious practices, above all, they are instructed in the Mass. The pupils are taught to say their prayers with "correct and distinct enunciation," taking turn about at leading. All are then formally dismissed to their homes except those appointed to sweep the class room, who remain a few moments longer.

#### IV

New pupils were generally admitted only at the first of a month. The modern sequence of semesters and grades seems to have been unfamiliar to the seventeenth century Ursulines, since pupils here were classed according to age and the number already in each class, classes being kept down in number, and still further divided into groups so as to secure individual instruction. No lesson was dropped until the teacher was sure of its mastery, and promotion depended upon industry and progress; hence, the average in the higher classes or groups was pretty sure to be a criterion of real scholarship. Several times a year, the Mistress General (Supervisor) visited the classes, examined the pupils, and decided upon the promotions, distributing awards.

As the morning session lasted only an hour and a half, the afternoon, two hours and a half,<sup>10</sup> the school day was short, but it must be remembered that there was only one vacation a year consisting of three weeks in the autumn; moreover, to this long school-year there were many interruptions for they never had school on Saturday afternoon, while on all Saints' days, known liturgically as Feasts of First and Second Class, the session was either shortened or entirely prorogued. Occasionally these breaks were supplied for by adding a period to the morning session on other days.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Chap. I, Art. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Art. 9.

The teachers gave their services gratis. An inconsiderable trifle,<sup>11</sup> "un sols par mois," was levied upon each pupil, the very poor excepted, for the small necessities of the class room; two or three sols a year for ink and pens, for brooms and the like, and each pupil was expected to bring some wood in winter. The fees were kept for the needs of the class room. If no woman were hired to clean the class rooms the pupils helped the Class Mistress do it.

Once a year the Mistress General assembled all the pupils to read to them the regulations established for their conduct in school, as well as the program of Christian duties which they were expected to carry out in their own homes. Thus was Angela's purpose of instruction for the home kept ever in mind by her daughters, even though cloistered. This annual assembly being held with proper dignity, it was left to the Class Mistresses to reread these regulations once or twice during the year, and especially to see that the Dixainières were perfectly familiar with them, as they were the leading spirits.

Among the special points of conduct emphasized by the Mother General, the *Reglemens* states that pupils are not allowed to exchange their exercises or other work; they are not to take liberties with one another; they are strictly forbidden to eat their lunch in the class room, or to munch during lessons. If any were rude or lazy at lessons, neglectful or noisy, they were punished by "some little embarrassment before the rest, such as going to the foot of the class, or to another part of the room or standing up while the others were seated, and the like." Serious misdemeanors were handled by the Mistress General, who alone could whip a child or inflict any other severe penalty.<sup>12</sup> One cannot but contrast this penal system with well-known English practices of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Such was the régime of the Extern or Day School, in its general aspect. The spirit of the teachers, inheriting from Angela, was one of motherliness; their principal aim was instruction in Christian

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. III, Art. 24, 25; also Chap. V, Art. 5, Sec. III; also Part I, Chap. II, 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Ursuline Constitutions*, Part I, Chap. IV, Art. 1.

dogma and Christian conduct, which they supplemented by the fostering of power in the child to think, to act, to express herself. The plan is based upon principles of order, self-control, and consideration for others, leading to an intelligent womanhood. Manifestly, it was a progress by means of emulation and awards, a positive rather than a negative building-up.

## V

The economy of the Boarding School under the Ursulines is likewise worthy of note. Here, a special treasurer had charge of the school finances, supplied by the community treasurer for such disbursements as were necessary. As in the Day School, there was a Supervisor entitled Mistress General, with a system of supervision much the same, except that now there was no mention of the Dixainière. As teacher and pupil lived day and night under the same roof and classes were limited in proportion to the number of available teaching nuns, there was, doubtless, not the same need for the assistance of Pupil-Teachers.<sup>13</sup>

The duties of the First and Second Class-Mistress in the Boarding School must have been very heavy and exacting. In the morning the First Mistress must preside at the toilette of the boarders in the dormitory, see to their morning prayers, take them to Mass and to breakfast, and finally start them at their lessons. Then the Second Class-Mistress replaced her after the morning session taking the pupils to dinner at eleven o'clock, to recreation, and once more settling them at their tasks. In the late afternoon the First Mistress attended to their Catechism, their supper, recreation, prayers and examen of conscience; and then she took them to bed. During lesson hours these same Mistresses marshalled the classes in rank to and fro all day to their several lessons, keeping order in the school. When one thinks of this work as a life-work, year after year, one cannot but admire the spirit it reveals.

There was an instructor for the work class — manual training — what we would call vocational training for girls; and an instructor for reading, spelling and arithmetic, or “casting accounts,” as they

<sup>13</sup> *Règlemens*, Part I, Chap. V.

expressed it. For writing there were several teachers, but these might serve in other branches, if necessary.

Nor may modern pedagogical critics cavil yet, for teachers' meetings were not a thing unknown in this ancient establishment; the *Règlements* provides in several places for conferences between teacher and teacher and between Supervisor and teacher. It insists that all little differences which naturally arise between them from time to time be kept to the Faculty and not be allowed to mar the harmony of the school. The Mistress General is forbidden to call attention to any defect in the teachers' work.<sup>14</sup> She is to gather her data regarding the pupils, their character and improvement, from the respective teachers, who, as the classes are restricted to eighteen or twenty pupils, have ample opportunity for studying the children under their care.

Angela's Mother-Idea is carried out in Article Two of Chapter Three of the *Règlements*:

"For the benefit of their pupils they should study to display a conduct full of sweetness and charity, of prudence, discretion, and *motherly* foresight, full of kindness and not too exacting."

The children, in their turn, are admonished:

"While they stay in the monastery, they should take the nuns who teach them for *their mothers*, since they hold the place of a *mother*."

In a thousand minutiae this maternal care may be observed. For instance, the Mistress General is to take her meals in the pupils' refectory at a table apart, in order to see that the little girls get proper food as to quantity and quality. Again, great notice is to be taken of a sick child by the Infirmarian, who is a nun acting under direction of a physician of the city. No one is to punish a girl older than twelve or fourteen without special reference to the Mistress General, and there is to be no such thing as punishing a child by depriving her of food or exposing her to cold; this is expressly set down in the *Règlements*.<sup>15</sup> One curiously notable point

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. III, Art. 39.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Chap. II, 26, 27; also Chap. III, Art. 26.





PAINING OF ANGELA TEACHING, BY VON FELSBURG. AT INNSBRUCK



in the hygiene of the school is, that they are to wash "their mouth and hands," and to have their hair brushed several times a day, and again, after meals, the mouth is to be washed before recreation.<sup>16</sup> "It is against both health and propriety to be constantly eating," says the *Règlements*.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the *ménage* of dormitory and refectory is carefully provided for.

The Class-Mistress has to *mother the children spiritually*. She is enjoined by the *Règlements* to teach them how to overcome themselves in their passions and bad inclinations, helping them to discover their strongest impulses. She is to give them some little exercises in the way of virtue, and to this end she is to talk with each one personally from time to time; this would appear to be an important part of their system of individual instruction.

How they all endured the winter in those cold French convents with their stone floors and draughty corridors it is not for a pampered modernist to say, but vivid glimpses are furnished in this quaint book where the day scholars in the Extern School are required to bring each one a contribution of wood for the fire in the Day School, and the nuns who attend the *ménage*, are to carry wood for the rooms in the Boarding School. When the dressmaker comes to the Pensionnat to fit the little ladies of the upper classes of society, the Mistress General must see that a fire is lighted before they disrobe to try on the new gown; she must, moreover, visit the children's wardrobe at the beginning of winter to find out if they have sufficient warm clothing and advise their mothers about it. Certain sisters are to brush and comb the children and see that they are properly dressed, and this "even in winter";<sup>18</sup> but lest they feel the cold, they must be sure to have on their shoes and stockings and some of their clothing, and "not keep their heads uncovered too long." There is a "coif" made of taffeta which bobs in and out of this quaint life-story, indicating what the fashionable headdress was at the time. One infers that fuel was rather scarce, since the nuns were instructed to hurry up to the dormitory after night prayers, close the windows if they were open, and "lay the

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. XV, 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. XV, Art. 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. XI, Art. 1.

fire so as to have it all ready to light when the boarders come up to undress for bed.”<sup>19</sup> . . . a trifle late, one would think! During the winter, the rising time is delayed a whole hour and if there does not happen to be Mass the boarders sleep until eight o’clock. If the chapel is chilly, night prayers may be said in the dormitory and the children may take recreation while preparing for bed.

These French damsels of the taffeta coif were not subject to any special uniform dress; they wore the clothes selected by their parents, avoiding superfluities. The only restriction specified here is that “their necks be covered,” and that they be “not frizzed nor powdered.” It is the old, old story! The mistress of the wardrobe had her hands full, no doubt—as the pupils, probably for the training entailed, helped fold the linens, while the older among them mended their own clothes, also, under direction of the Work Mistress. Both the manager of the wardrobe and the manager of the burse had to keep strict record of all belongings.

Recreation might be taken in the garden, but pupils are “not to be seen in the garden or court without their gloves, hats, or coifs and masks!” It is to be remembered that ladies of the higher classes did not appear abroad in Paris streets with face bare; the Parisians were indignant at Marie Antoinette, “the Austrian,” several generations later, for driving out in simple style with face uncovered. The nuns are to make their pupils content and gay, however, and allow them to play games, sharing in their youthful pleasures, but they must not permit anything indecent or improper, “such as comedies, cards, dances,” nor any loose or vulgar songs. The girls may play at battledore and shuttlecock, at bowls, and the quiet game of chess.<sup>20</sup> There are glimpses of the Dauphin himself coming to play bowls with them—an honor, indeed, not to be sneezed at, by future courtiers!

Pupils are free to visit their parents and friends in the salon and they may go home occasionally for a wedding or christening,<sup>21</sup> or some other family event, though rarely over night. They may bestow alms through the Mistress General, who sometimes has the poor introduced into the parlors so the young benefactress may go

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. XII, Art. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. III, p. 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. II, 14; Chap. V, p. 13.



in person to see them and give the contents of a purse or such worn clothing as their parents are willing they should give.

A small fee is levied upon the school for prizes to be dispensed from time to time. The monastery itself, being endowed by some lady of high degree — the Paris monastery was endowed by Mme. de Sainte Beuve — a lady who retains the privilege of her own suite of rooms within the cloister, and the upkeep being provided for out of this income together with such dowries as individual nuns bring with them from their families, the rather inconsiderable fees of the boarders are stretched to help cover the current expense of both Boarding and Extern School; from which we judge that the value of a prize in the Rue St. Jacques was, above all, intrinsic.

## VI

There is in this seventeenth century *Règlements* considerable mention of books. This is not surprising. A monastic institution without books in the Middle Ages, even so late, would be an anomaly indeed. Monasticism civilized Europe partly through its books, and so Ursulines have a library of "suitable books," which they lend out to the pupils,<sup>22</sup> the latter being enjoined to spend their leisure moments reading. The Mistresses often read aloud to them. There seems also to be much bringing of books into the cloister, for in several regulations the Supervisors are warned to be careful what books are introduced, inasmuch as every book published in France had to contain a printed "Privilège du Roi," and there is little doubt that attempts to evade the troublesome censorship might bring the owner of a contraband volume into disrepute. Moreover, the Council of Trent had been very strict upon the introduction of heretical works into the cloister. The school was established between 1608 and 1610, at which date the bitter troubles of the Religious Revolution were about to break out into the bloody Thirty Years War in Germany, while the turmoil in France itself was but lately over.

And so it is that the *Règlements* takes the question of books rather seriously. If you met some tall sister hurrying down the

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. III, Art. 23.

corridor with several volumes under her arm, you need not raise eyebrows at the title, for she would explain that Ursulines are enjoined to prepare for their teaching of Christian Doctrine by studying such authorities as the works of Bellarmine, and of Cardinal Richelieu, the "Catéchisme Romaine," and others.<sup>23</sup> The Mistress General is to see that these are at disposal, the books being given out and taken up again, in accord with some definite system. In each classroom, too, is a small collection of books. The volumes could not have been very cheap, for the old custom of copying books still maintained. Whether for this reason, or because it was considered a necessary part of their education, pupils, besides their regular reading books had "books of handwriting" and were given lessons in deciphering them, as though this were a special art.

The children learned to read in the vernacular. It is notable that these little French girls were taught to read both in Latin and French, French being considered the more difficult. Of the younger children the *Règlemens* says: "Those who are not yet able to read French, will read twice a day in Latin;"<sup>24</sup> while the girls of the higher classes read Latin in the morning, French after dinner.

## VII

In spring and fall the boarders rose at half past five or six for Mass. Indeed, the hour for the Holy Sacrifice seems to have been surprisingly uncertain, considering the number of clergy in the city, for sometimes the children were to rise at five-thirty, again at six, and sometimes not till eight.

The mediaeval European took plenty of time to live. There was no hurry. The order for the day was

| NUNS                                                                         | PUPILS                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 4 A.M. Rise.                                                                 | Rise 5.30 or 6 Summer; |
| 4.30 Mental Prayer.                                                          | 6.30 Winter.           |
| 5.30 Angelus.                                                                | Morning Prayer 6.45.   |
| Liturgical Prayer.                                                           | Mass 7.                |
| Little Hours.                                                                | Breakfast.             |
| 6.15 Second Mental Prayer for<br>those who were dispensed from<br>the first. | Classes 8;             |
|                                                                              | End 10.                |
|                                                                              | Litany 10.15.          |

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. I, Art. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. III, Art. 17.

NUNS (*continued*)

- 7 Mass.  
 15 minutes spiritual reading  
 in common.  
 Obediences.  
 10.15 Examen in Chapel or  
 Chapter Room.  
 10.30 Dinner.  
 45 minutes recreation.  
 12 Angelus.  
 12.15 Spiritual reading in common.  
 2.30 Liturgical Prayer: Vespers,  
 Complin.  
 Obediences.  
 4.15 Litany, Mental Prayer.  
 5. Prayer ends.  
 5.15 Supper.  
 45 minutes recreation.  
 Free time.  
 7. Angelus.  
 Liturgical Prayer: Matins, Lauds.  
 Examen.  
 Points for Meditation.  
 Superior's Blessing.  
 8.30 Bed Bell.

 PUPILS (*continued*)

- Dinner 10.30.  
 Reading aloud during meals.  
 Recreation.  
 Classes 12.15;  
 End 2.  
 Prayer 2.15.  
 Luncheon (*Gouté*) 2.45.  
 Classes 3.  
 Catechism or public or private reading  
 or work. 4.15.  
 Supper in silence.  
 Recreation.  
 Prayer. Examen. 6.45.  
 Retire 8.<sup>25</sup>

Hours of repast and Office change on Feast Days and Ceremonial occasions.<sup>26</sup> However, in spite of the formidable array of hours in this seventeenth century way of life, the program for the pupils was variable according to circumstances, both the rising time and the class periods being altered with some flexibility. Quite a number of nuns were required to fill the demands of the two busy schools, besides those needed for the duties of the general domestic run of the house because the community itself had to be clothed, housed and fed, to say nothing of the arduous task of its administration. If pupils' parents were interviewed, charities doled out, and illustrious guests entertained, the finesse of hospitality was no small matter in the establishment. Then too, for the busy Class Mistresses special arrangements were made; these broke their fast before going to their daily tasks, and had extra times assigned to them for the performance of chapel duties from which they were necessarily absented.

<sup>25</sup> *Règlemens*, Part I, Chap. XIII.

<sup>26</sup> *Constitutions of Ursulines of Paris*. Part II.

The nuns' horarium is set down here purposely. It would not be giving a complete survey of the Ursuline Idea to present only the pupils' regimen; one must see also the life of the teachers behind the scenes if one wishes to grasp the full significance of the scheme. From the amount of prayer in the daily round it is evident that their design was a spiritual life, a life of constant union with God, to be exercised here and now for the benefit of the neighbor. It was a community of possessions and of interests, in which the spiritual fabric was made up of individual parts each in its way contributing to the entirety of effect: the nun who swept the kitchen being at once contributor and recipient in the general benefactions, through the great work of education. Of course the Three R's, as taught in those days, demanded the minimum preparation from a teacher, compared with the heavy burdens of present day curricula; Christian Doctrine was the branch which necessitated the most study, and this was linked up with the religious life of the teachers in such a way that the essence of their best teaching actually was the outgrowth of their own individual lives, action springing from contemplation. As time went on, and secular learning came more and more into vogue, it is clear that the system would have to be modified and was, so as to yield proportionate time for study.

## VIII

The day's program, at first reading, looks austere and bare of interest. The life of the nuns, which to the idealist might in outline be called a program of peace, to another viewpoint might seem repellent in its monotony, excepting that one finds revealed in the *Règlements* a surprising break, a series of Feast Days, which, for nuns and pupils, must have had the effect of a glorious sequence of birthdays with both spiritual and material plum puddings enough to make any heart stout! The First and Second Class Feast days of the Church or Saint commemoration days, as they really are, brought general recreations, beautiful and joyous ceremonial with rich music and gorgeous decorations, and sometimes, even honored guests trailing their silks through the awakened corridors, courts, and gardens, in laughter and jest, the table loaded with festival goodies, and the thousand clever and amusing diversions in which



the French people are gifted with peculiar genius. Tired and happy, their youth renewed like the eagle's, the entire household sank at last to slumber, the youth of years and the youth of simple life, side by side, relaxed and rested, ready to resume on the morrow the earnest labor of regular life.

It was part of the training in these schools to educate young Christians to that life-expression of Christianity, known as the Liturgy of the Church. It has been seen how the Latin language from time immemorial had been taken up by them even more readily than their own vernacular, probably because of the fixity of Latin and the shifting state of the French. The prayer periods in the school, at a quarter past two and a quarter to seven in the evening, were devoted mainly to the reciting of Vespers or of Matins though only of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sometimes, the children might be permitted to recite it in choir from side to side like the nuns. On Feast days they could attend the Great Office which the nuns chanted on such days. Thus they were brought up on the Liturgy, and were taught to love their share in that great voice of praise by which the Church hymns the Creator during the ceaseless round of the Christian Year. Why was such a point made, one may query, why focus the attention of the pupils on a feature peculiar to the religious life? It was because the Church Liturgy, as such, belongs not to monastic life, but to the whole body of Christians: it was to train the young to see the meanings and purpose of such a worship which in their age and country could be heard resounding in any cathedral or collegiate church, a service to which the general faithful went as to a feast of the soul, voiced in music, art and dignified ceremonial; the object was, in short, not to incline young girls to monasticism, as this was expressly forbidden by the Ursuline rule whose real objective was the influencing of the Christian home, but to make them as Christian women, lovers and participants of the life which is everybody's Christianity.

## IX

It is a rare thing to come across so detailed a method of teaching as is this set down in the *Règlements* of the Paris Ursulines in 1652.

To the teachers in the convent Rue St. Jacques the little handbook must have taken the place of what is known today as the *Handbook for Teachers* in the Public Schools of any one city in the United States, only with the difference that the book is not subject to the changes made by any or every new City Superintendent who has ideas to propagate. The *Règlements* existed for the training of the young teachers and these were expected to master and to carry out its detail. However, with the usual characteristic sensitiveness to the need of flexibility which the Ursulines inherited from their great Foundress, Angela Merici, any cut and dried rigidity was precluded by the following passage in the little book:

"This method has been proved by experience to be the best, nevertheless it is not desired to restrict the teacher to it, so that she may not make any changes in it, if she judges proper."<sup>27</sup>

The methods, then, which they considered "the best" for writing, arithmetic, spelling, reading, and catechism, are so explicit, that they are valuable set down almost verbatim from the old French. The chapter on the "Teacher of Writing" says: "When any of the pupils have their hand sufficiently formed in writing, the Teacher will advise the Mistress so she can have them taught orthography."<sup>28</sup> From this passage we understand that the tasks laid out for each pupil were in the following order: 1. Writing; 2. Spelling; 3. Reading, Arithmetic, etc.

#### METHOD OF TEACHING WRITING<sup>29</sup>

The writing lesson takes place in the dining room,<sup>30</sup> where the long tables are suited to the rows of little coifed girls who can find space to spread out as much as they like. Several teachers do the teaching. The pupils must sit up straight while they are writing, and those who are not tall enough to write easily at the table must not write much at a time. The picture is irresistibly charming, the long tables, the prim posture, the quill pens, the unmanageable ink,

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. VI, Art. 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. VI, Art. 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. VI.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. I, Art. 4.

the blots, the tears, in spite of the fact that "on each table are some small pieces of linen or old taffeta to wipe their pens with." Then the silence and the seriousness of the occasion, in spite of which it is found necessary to legislate for times when folks are lazy, and "make noise and disorder, and prevent the others from writing!" Who would have thought it of our grandmothers!

All beginners must have special guidance for about six weeks, the teachers always paying most attention to the backward ones, guiding the little hands if necessary. The pupil must hold the pen well, with three fingers — no more, no less!

Each class has a whole hour for writing; and if there are many in the class the teacher has at least one assistant. If there are three classes their lesson time is:

Writing, 1st Class 8:15 A.M. to 9:15; 2nd Class Reading, Arithmetic.  
Writing, 2nd Class 12 M. to 2:15; 1st Class Reading, Arithmetic.  
Writing, 3rd Class 12 M. to 2:15.

Sometimes this order is reversed. Again, all three classes are occasionally taught writing at the same period, according to convenience. The pupils' papers are to have their name and surname written on them and those of each class are to be kept in a separate place in the cupboard. Outside of class hours the teacher prepares models for the writing lesson, models of a single line, two lines, sentences, or verses, which she will distribute with their papers, removing them after the lesson. But she may also write samples for them during class on their own papers.

She teaches the details of each letter. 1. First she teaches them how to form *O* and *I*; then, *A*, *U*, *M*, *N*, taking care not to change the letter until the pupil knows how to form it well.

2. After that follow *b*, *d*, *l*, *f*, *g*, *h*, and the rest, giving the easiest first.

3. Then she teaches the various combinations, *um*, *mm*, *mn*.

4. Next, words that have no consonants, with three lines devoted to each word.

5. Then come long words containing consonants.

6. When the pupil has mastered words, she is to take lines, then two lines, being very careful about spacing.

7. Finally, she learns how to make two kinds of figures, Roman and "barbare," i.e., Arabic. The teacher always writes the word first, the pupil copies it. The teacher corrects the faults, and gives remedial teaching on the details of each letter.

And woe betide the little girl who carries on any scribbling outside of class! For the writing teacher must oversee any letters written to parents, and correct the spelling. By way of encouragement, the pupils that are most advanced are rewarded for industry by being permitted to write the class notices for the Saints' days. What wonder that our French ancestors were distinguished for the fine and beautiful chirography that puts modern handwriting to the blush!

In retracing this simple mode of training it is interesting to note the way the nuns made use of modern pedagogical principles while perfectly innocent of modern pedagogical technique in theory. There is very evident throughout the writing method the appeal to the Instinctive Basis of Habits, the careful training of Memory, the control of Emotion, and even of what is called today the principle of Transfer of Training, the carrying over of skill gained in one field to another field. The silence and order observed in the lesson show that the instructors realized how, other things being equal, Primacy, or the original response to a situation, is the strongest. Note, likewise, how the other laws of learning are observed: such as Frequency, Vividness, and the like.

## X

### METHOD OF TEACHING SPELLING

And spelling — the despair of the modern English Department in colleges, might take on new hope in a Renaissance of this old, common-sense method.

Eight or ten children are taught spelling at a time, and every child does not have a lesson every day. Each is provided with a printed book and a sheet of white paper.<sup>31</sup> The teacher dictates clearly and distinctly, word for word, two or three lines from the book, which the pupil writes down. Then each child is given her

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. VIII, Arts. 8, 9, 10.



own book to correct her own spelling, writing the correct form above the words that have been misspelled. Then at once the class are made to write the same passage over again without looking at what they wrote before. Next day, they write once more the same thing on a fresh sheet of paper, and the lesson is not changed until they can write it without mistake.

A second method may be used. The pupils are furnished with an exercise book. The teacher reads from her book three or four lines which they write in their blank book. She then calls upon some one in the class to spell the words aloud, and each one corrects her own work. Then the teacher examines to see if they have done the work properly. The following day she has them write on fresh paper the same passage in order to fix it in memory.

The chapter on "Teaching Spelling" closes with the discreet remark that the teacher is not to speak of the mistakes which she discovers the pupils making except to their Mistress. In this method we find very substantial traces of what is known in pedagogy today as perception-training: the child sees the words and their elements and translates this sensory experience into its intellectual meanings. The repetition of the same exercise next day secures its linking up with the Apperceptive mass in the mind, besides storing the experience in memory according to well known laws of learning.

## XI

### METHOD OF TEACHING READING <sup>32</sup>

Reading is taught from books of handwriting, each pupil having a copy of her own. The class is instructed in small groups as before, not every group being heard every day.

The teacher must give the easiest reading to those who are beginners, teaching them to recognize the letters and the abbreviations. She has them read but little at a time and tries to have them discover the words for themselves, if possible.

The usual way is for the teacher to spell out five or six lines, and then read about a page or so, pronouncing well, and observing the pauses and accents, while at the same time, all the class follow in their own books and read in a low tone, word for word, with the

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. III, Arts. 14, 19.

teacher. This being done, the teacher appoints one pupil to repeat it in a loud voice, all or in part, and after her, another, and so on, until all the class have read, the teacher correcting the mistakes as they go along. This method of reading is employed twice a day, in Latin during the morning, and in French in the afternoon.

In the lower classes, where ordinarily the pupils are more ignorant, the lesson is shorter, and the teacher has them repeat several times if necessary. In these classes, the teacher uses the time left over to take the most backward pupils one by one and have them read at leisure so as to see what they know and encourage them to learn.<sup>33</sup>

While this is going on, those who have already finished their lesson may read something else, or work at numbers, or sewing.

The fact that the child is encouraged to make out the word for herself<sup>34</sup> is an exercise in concept building of no mean value. The apperceptions of the child could not be stimulated in a much better way, and it likewise stimulates both Attention and personal Interest. The flagging of Interest is provided against by allowing pupils who have done their reading to turn to some other task. Thus the mediaeval classroom is turned into a miniature laboratory of the most approved kind, the teacher giving individual instruction to the one, while the many work out their own problems.

## XII

### METHOD OF TEACHING ARITHMETIC<sup>35</sup>

First, the teacher will impart the nine Arabic figures, and the nine Roman figures.

She then teaches the pupils to count to one thousand. After learning this she teaches them to count with small, round, flat pieces called jetons, made of ivory or metal. These are given the pupils in quantities, and they arrange them in a sort of vertical scale on the box or the table, beginning with one at the bottom, two above, then three, and so on, the child learning the makeup and combination of the numbers, much as with the wire and ball devices of the modern kindergarten.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. III, Art. 19.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. III, Art. 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Part II, Chap. VIII, Art. 1-6.

By degrees, they do harder tasks, and keep on, to such as are as difficult as they are able to do. After this, she teaches them to calculate with various sorts of numbers; for example,

*How much are 7 and 7? 6 times 5?*

beginning always with the easiest. Next, she makes them calculate the cost of things they would buy; for example,

*15 yards of cloth at 45 sols 4 deniers a yard?*<sup>36</sup>

When they get the answer, she has them find the sum total, and pay it in different kinds of money.

Then she gives practical problems which they must work out with their pens. Among the supplies listed for the school there is no mention of pencils but merely of pens, paper, penknives. Think of working all your problems with a quill pen! The teacher must provide on paper various sorts of problems in figures and of various values, to teach the pupils to add up and to count. She must teach the children only in ones and twos so as to make sure that they all understand. The *Règlemens* stipulates that she must see that they apply themselves the entire period upon the work appointed for them to do; hence, it is evident that they did what is known as seat work. She must not allow them to talk about other things, or do any other kind of work: herein we see a distinction from the reading method, which does permit the pupil to be otherwise occupied, when not actually engaged with the teacher.

In this system of arithmetic, is evidenced Reason training, with very good drill in mental arithmetic. Interest is supplied by using that very principle so much insisted upon today, namely, framing the problems in terms familiar to the pupil's experience: for example, basing calculations upon things girls would buy, working them out in money which the little girls would be likely to use, and so on. By the use of the "jetons," sensory training is linked up with reasoning, a method beyond which the modern kindergarten has not gone far. The computation in different moneys would seem to imply a knowledge of division, although it is not specifically mentioned.

<sup>36</sup> The sol is a cent. The denier is an old French copper coin worth  $\frac{2}{13}$  of a farthing, or 2.42 centimes.

## XIII

METHOD OF MANUAL TRAINING <sup>37</sup>

But the course in manual training was the real preparation for home-life. The Bursar for the school is ordered to keep a supply of significantly feminine articles, slippers, gloves, combs and brushes, ribbons, silks of all colors, threads of various sorts, needles, thimbles, spangles, lacers, needle cases and the like; for the same little ladies who were taught to salute their teachers with curtsies, and to stand aside at doorways for their elders, were required to take a hand in domesticities and prepare themselves for a career of usefulness. It seems that whenever a few moments lapsed in the well appointed day, they were to "work," which meant to get out their needle and thread. Besides learning sewing, they had to learn to mend and even to make over their garments occasionally; each pupil had a turn at folding the clothes when these came in from the wash, and the older girls ironed their collars and cuffs; turn about, they helped set the table and cleared it again after the meal, piling up the plates to be washed. They assisted in making their own beds, and served their turn in putting away things used in class, such as books, work-baskets, jetons, paper. Thus were they taught to be orderly.

The Work Teacher is exhorted to be very kind in showing the pupils how to work, taking them in groups of not more than two or three at a time, during the lesson, one pupil being beside the teacher while the others work in their places. She is to begin by the simplest and most necessary processes, making a plain seam or a hem or tuck, marking on canvas or linen. Later, the pupils may do tapestry work "*à point compté*." Then, they may learn other kinds of work, such as embroidering flowers, embroidering in gold and silver, making different kinds of laces, French, English, whatever is customary, and whatever their parents may desire.

The teacher will look at their work often, and herself work for their observation; she will teach them how to manage their thread, wool, and stuffs, and when they do badly she will have them do their work over again.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. VII.



## XIV

METHOD OF TEACHING RELIGION<sup>38</sup>

With all this care for the young body and the young mind, it is significant of the esteem in which the Ursulines held the spiritual nature of their young charges, that sixteen pages in the *Règlements* are devoted to how Religion is to be taught. The topics under which the matter is subdivided are as follows:

Catechism Lesson  
Going to Confession  
Holy Communion  
Confirmation  
Renewal of Baptismal Vows  
Preparation for First Communion  
Manner of Instruction  
Subject Matter of Instruction.  
Preparation for General Confession  
Immediate Preparation for First Communion

The Catechism lesson takes place at a quarter past five in the evening, a brief period of study having been allowed at three o'clock. The teaching method is ingenious. Pupils do the studying two by two, going over the text and the prayers to be memorized.

The teacher begins the lesson by calling one pupil to her side and appointing her to question her companions on the text: these rise, one by one, and answer as long as the teacher ordains. This is carried out with each member of the class, or a part of it. She must see that they speak distinctly and exactly, and she herself must ask them some questions now and then to see if they understand what they are saying, and if not, she must explain it to them.

After this, they review what was said at the last lesson, sometimes changing the terms in which the lesson was couched, so as to reenforce the knowledge of what has been taught, in order that they may retain the matter not only by memory, but grasp it with their understanding and link it up with what they already have learned

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. IV, V.

and experienced. It is recommended to begin with the most deficient pupils, and when they miss to refer the question to the more advanced. But if both fail to remember either entirely or in part, the teacher must repeat what she said, and refrain from changing the lesson as yet.

The repetition being completed, they will go on with the matter already begun, which must be handled with order, clearness, and brevity; and it is recommended to give it in narrative style, this principally for the benefit of pupils who are as yet not very well instructed, or who have difficulty in grasping. In subjects that cannot be given in narrative form, like the theological virtues, and the Sacraments, and the like, let the teacher make use of familiar comparisons suitable to their capacity.

From this point the emphasis of the lesson is swung around to the emotions and the will. After all the explanations have been given and grasped,

“it will be good to arouse in the pupil affections appropriate to the subject. If they are speaking about the Creation, excite them to gratitude to God for having created them for so noble an end, and for having given them a soul capable of loving and enjoying His Divine Majesty eternally. If it be the Four Last Things, lead them to the fear of God and the dread of His judgments, illustrating this by some story. If the subject is the mysteries of our Redemption, inspire them to love Our Saviour Jesus Christ, and teach them, particularly the older ones, to make acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and to practice ejaculatory prayer, recounting to them the example of some saint, or telling them some other story to impel them to practice these teachings.

“It is a good thing if they ask questions, but these should be suggested by the matter in hand, otherwise the time will pass unprofitably.

“They must treat of divine mysteries with respect, talking without precipitation, and keeping the mind concentrated upon what they are saying. The teacher may have some book with her, or some written notes to help her memory.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. IV, Sec. I, Arts. V, VI, VII.

There is evident here, undoubtedly, a strong similarity to what is known historically as the Sulpician Method of Teaching Christian Doctrine; the use of stories and similitudes, the appeal to the feelings, the reserving of the principal attention of the teacher for the explanation, and watching of the child's mind while she relegates to a species of pupil-teacher the hearing of the Catechism text, the referring of a missed question to a pupil put upon her mettle as referee, all show ideas similar to those of the Sulpicians. The special text-book to be used is not named in these pages, but the method is certainly synthetical as the teacher and not the book is the point of interest. The lesson comes from the "living lips of the Teacher."<sup>40</sup>

The principle of regulating the emotions in harmony with the intellect seems to have played considerable part in the Ursuline methods. We note how carefully it is employed in the specific teaching of the Sacraments. For instance:

"Several days before receiving the Sacrament of Penance, which for the pupils who have not made their First Communion, little ones from six to eight years old, should be about six weeks or two months and once a month for the older ones, the Class Mistress will give them a Catechism lesson on the Sacrament of Penance, explaining the three parts of the Sacrament, to wit, Contrition, Confession, and Satisfaction, she will show them its necessity, the obligation of making the Confession entire and the manner of confessing properly and of examining the conscience. She will dwell specially, now on one point, now on another."<sup>41</sup>

So much for the actual instruction. But for the psychology of the lesson:

"The day they are going to Confession, one of the teachers will give them a subject for prayer from the Passion of Our Lord, or some other matter proper to excite them to sorrow for their sins, that they may consider it during Mass; and if there is time, she may have them then and there form acts of Contrition, by herself

<sup>40</sup> See *Cath. Encyc. s.v.* "Christian Doctrine" (T. B. Scannell).

<sup>41</sup> *Reglemens*, Part I, Chap. IV, Sec. II.

pronouncing aloud some precise formula, which the pupils will follow interiorly.”<sup>42</sup>

There seems to be some wisdom in this method: it is not spoiled by any mechanical routine; the child does not recite any cut and dried act of Contrition which has become a mere mechanical effort, without much thought or feeling; the child is not forced, but mind and will are gently influenced through suggestion.

The nuns are to teach very carefully the art of self-examination, both to boarders and day scholars, these last making their Confession in their respective parish churches, excepting upon two or three annual occasions, when they will be allowed to receive the Sacraments in the convent chapel under personal direction of the teachers. At such times, the teacher assembles bands of eighteen or twenty in the oratory, and helps them with their examen, pronouncing aloud the special headings under which they ought to examine themselves, and pausing every little while to give time for self-consideration. She will rehearse the motives for Contrition, and suggest acts of love and sorrow for sin. In training the boarders who live under the nuns' more immediate care, whoever is teaching will suggest to them, furthermore, points in which she has observed that they are individually faulty, so that these too may receive some thought.

Under such a system it would seem that a child could scarcely fail to be brought up with at least the knowledge of what constitutes the criteria of conscience. To the least sympathetic, the method must appear to be a permanent and valuable life-help. Even our own Benjamin Franklin tested out the examen of conscience.

Vocal Prayer, too, had its own time for special training, while the *Règlement* distinctly calls for the teaching of Mental Prayer.<sup>43</sup>

## XV

As has been mentioned elsewhere in these pages, the beautiful ceremonial which has become an everyday practice in every country, the impressive ceremony of First Communion Day, originated right here with the Paris Ursulines of the Rue St. Jacques.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. IV, Sec. 2, Art. 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. III, Art. 23.



On that great day, the First Communicants, so says the *Règlemens*, are to dress in white linen, with a coif of white taffeta, and a cincture of the same. They wear white veils. After dinner on that day, nuns and children assemble, the First Communicants having the place of honor, and they sing the anthem "Dominus regit me," "The Lord ruleth me"; then the hymn "O sacrum convivium" is sung, after which the Superioress herself recites the Versicle

*"Thou hast given them bread from Heaven,  
Replenished with all delights!"*

which she follows with the usual Benediction prayer. Then the children of the school in their turn sing one of those little spiritual canticles which generations of French children are brought up upon, while meantime the Communicants embrace each other and all the children of the school, one by one; the ceremony ends with their kneeling for the blessing of the Superioress. On this festa day the First Communicants take their repast at a table apart with the Mistress General, no less, and the young Communicants have the privilege of leading the Grace at table.

What was the educational significance of such a performance? Was it a mere sentimentality that drew those grave, elderly nuns to give themselves and their valuable time thus to the relaxation of a childish hour? was it even to increase the emotional stress of a religious event? It has been said of certain people that they have retained incongruously all the ceremonial of the First Communion Day, only to relapse in the near future into a shrugging religious indifference that lasts the rest of their lives. It has even been attributed to an exaggerated ceremonial that there is such a reaction. About this we make no contention.

To understand aright the mind of the Ursulines, one must remember that at the time of this *Règlemens* of theirs, at the time of the establishment of this ceremonial, ceremony was the very breath of French society, and the nuns, dealing with future members of that society, strove simply, as Christ taught, by the analogy of the lilies, to teach their young pupils the reverse of the false values prevailing at the French court, and ruining an intelligent but infatuated people. For during those very days, in the palace chapel

at Versailles, the brocaded and perfumed ladies, Catholics all, knelt, by court custom, not so much facing the altar on which they believed the Real Presence to be, as turning with their faces towards the rear gallery where sat King Louis XIV, enthroned. The protest of the Ursulines was perhaps embodied in this little ceremony at the monastery. They trained the young daughters of those court sycophants as best they could, not indeed to depreciate ceremony, provided right authority were its center, but to value all human dignity only proportionately with the Divine. The least little girl who had received her God into her heart, ranked above all, as "the queen in vesture of gold."

That civilization and those women are long passed away. The wisdom of such a training abides.

The method of preparing pupils for receiving the Holy Eucharist consisted in a four or five weeks' special course of instruction, based to a great extent upon the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and the matter, form, nature and effects of the Sacrament itself. The teacher reviewed the articles of Faith contained in the Apostles' Creed, the virtue of Hope as expressed in their Morning Prayers, and Charity as embodied in the Commandments.<sup>44</sup> The same teaching technique was employed that they used in the Catechism lesson, except, perhaps, with less memorizing of the text. The part of the preparation bearing upon the child's will was particularly emphasized and reenforced. Signal use was made of the pedagogical principle of Preparation of Mind, the arousing of Apperception, we would call it today. Even for First Communion, and indeed, on all Communion days, a brief time was always spent early in the morning, recalling to mind just what was about to take place, reviewing the dispositions one should have; and lastly they presented to the pupils' minds some part of Our Lord's Passion that they might be aroused to dispositions of the love of their God and Saviour. Thus, all their concepts were derived from individual experience in the most thorough way possible, the Instinctive Basis of Habits being carefully provided for. To any thinking mind going over this little book, it would seem that modern enlightenment has really not done so very much in pedagogy, after all, beyond the

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Part I, Chap. V, Art. II, Sec. V.

actual detailed formulation of its philosophy in exact scientific terminology and classification. Teaching is really more of an art than of a science and any new developments are dependent upon the spontaneity of an incalculable personal genius. As a great art it moves slowly. The science must wait for the art.

In reviewing the contents then, of the school *Règlements* sent at request of the Ursulines from the printing shop of Monsieur Louis Josse to be examined by the Paris Vicar General on that fourth day of March in 1652, one is inclined to agree with that worthy gentleman in pronouncing it "a method very important in the Christian and secular education of children:" for in this quaint and interesting *Règlements* of theirs are to be found almost all the elements which are considered so valuable in present day teaching-methods; and besides these there is the proper securing of Attention and Interest, the right evaluation of Environment and of Individual Instruction; Memory, Imagination, Emotion, each has its place; and the special devotedness of the teachers to the character and personality of their pupils brings their teaching methods up to the first rank of enlightened systems of education.

So, with this review of the historical development of Angela's purpose, from bud to full flower and fruit, we draw to a close.

#### CONCLUSION

Within these pages it has been desired to trace the history of the mind of Angela Merici; to show the influences which shaped its development; to trace her *Teaching Idea* and the supernatural inspiration which she claimed to have prompted it; the reactions which the movements of her times wrought upon it; its place among the contributions of famous teachers; its prolific growth and organic connection with the history of European society in the dawn of the modern era; and finally, the wide-spreading branches and fruits it has borne.

The women of the Renaissance may be sung in song and story, their wit, their beauty, their influence, their initiative — knelled and belled according as the concensus of opinion is swayed. But which of the Gonzagas or d'Estes, the Colonnas or the Medici favorites, has produced a creative work such as this?

This woman was a person — without prestige, without money, without influence. In an age when the sentiment of European society, Church and State, favored cloister, she launched a scheme, and she launched it with papal approval, for the regeneration of that society, by means of non-cloistered religious women, working within the family circle, through the home.

And in face of all the religious organizations whose special pride it is to adhere constantly to the unchanged *Rule* of their founders, Angela Merici drew from the Holy See approbation for her Order to change with the exigencies of time.

She was the first person who ever gathered women together in a formal organization to teach girls; and this she did at a moment when the fortunes of the young girl in European society were at their lowest ebb. In pedagogical insight and method she outshowered all her contemporaries by going straight to the psychology of the adolescent girl.

Like the disturbing pebble in the pool awakening circle upon circle, her spiritual influence and her teaching ideas are actuating hundreds of women in hundreds of schoolrooms today, and better still, thousands of mothers in thousands of homes.

This Angela Merici was a person of large mind, tender heart, creative force and a clear vision replete with the subtle inspiration which is beyond mortal ken. “*Gratia super gratiam mulier sancta et pudorata: disciplina illius domum Dei est,*” so quoted Pius VII in the Bull of her Canonization. And he continued in happy vein, “She instituted a society of maidens, which, like to a rose in early spring, has filled the Church with virtue’s sweetest odor down to the present day, and with the help of God, it will go on through future ages.”<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Pius VII, Bull of Canonization, 1807.



## SOURCE MATERIALS

### SOURCES

- A. THE DOCUMENTS which furnish matter for the study of Angela Merici's character are, first of all, those which she herself dictated to her secretary, the priest, Gabriel Cozzano, of which he attested that there was not a single word of his own. They are
1. *The Rule of Angela Merici*
  2. *Her Last Will and Testament*
  3. *Her Counsels*
- B. IN CONTEMPORANEOUS CHRONICLE there is the *Chronicle* of Pandolfo Nassino.
1. Nassino was a man of considerable parts, who held high administrative positions, and was a collector of inscriptions and documents. A manuscript of some 800 pages on the history, archaeology and arts of the city and province of Brescia exists in the Queriniana Library, in autograph form, and will shortly be edited and published by Prof. Guerrini in his compilation of the unedited Brescian chronicles of the 15th to the 19th century. Nassino affirmed that he knew Angela personally. It was he who recorded her death in 1540. He left a page vacant for further notice of her, which fact shows what he thought of her importance, but the page was never filled.
  2. The next chronicle is a letter dated 1556, from Francesco Landini of Brescia, Superior of the Company of St. Ursula. He wrote to a Franciscan Minorite of Milan, giving intimate information which he had gathered about the life of Angela.
  - I. The first COMPLETE BIOGRAPHY compiled was written by Gio. Battista Nazari, 1560, a Brescian citizen, writer and notary; a man of prominence in Brescia. It was based upon Municipal Records: Sworn Depositions of four witnesses who had known Angela Merici personally. Nazari, as Notary, in 1568, with the approval of the Superior of the Ursulines and the approbation of the Bishop, Domenico Bollani, registered the testimony of these four men. A copy of it is given in the appendix of Dott. Giuditta Bertolotti's *Storia di S. Angela Merici*, Brescia, 1923. She obtained her copy, she says, from a lawyer in Desenzano. The four witnesses were
    1. Marc Antonio di' Romani, a merchant in whose house Angela lived for fourteen years.
    2. Bertoli di Boscoli, a cabinet-maker.

3. Giacomo Chizzola, a knight; a grave, serious character, and a man of learning. He it was who pointed out Angela's remarkable knowledge of Latin.

4. Agostino Gallo, a patrician; a man famous in Brescian civic life, for his culture and his various writings on Agriculture. His house, fronting the Church of San Clementi, bears a tablet erected in his honor by the municipality.

II. P. D. Giacomo Tribesco, Lateran Choir Master of St. Afra's Church in Brescia, wrote in the year 1591 his recollections of Angela Merici. He had stood in friendly relations with her, and repeatedly received her advice, for which reason he considered himself her spiritual son. His Attestate was added to the "Collectione Miscellanae factat per Adn. R.P.D. Florianni, Canalem Brix. can. reg. Aug. S. Salvatoris Ordinis S. Augustine." This manuscript belonged to the library of the above-mentioned Canons of the Church of San Giovanni in Brescia. The Bollandists refer to them in the volume April 3 (S. 274 and 494) of their *Acta Sanctorum*, where they report the Brescian bishops, St. Honoris and St. Theopholis.

III. P. Mathia Bellintani da Salò is the last contemporary of Angela who wrote about her. At her death he was only seven years old, but he is considered to be of her time because he was born, lived and died in Salò, d. 1598. Angela's mother was from Salò, and she herself lived there many years before she moved to Brescia, and later visited the town many times. So Bellintani could have learned from relatives and friends much that until the days of his book was unknown. Yet in spite of this, he is not a reliable source. He relates with historical pathos, and with evident effort to surround his heroine with an aureola of the wonderful. His work remains in manuscript and is at present in the Queriniana MS. B. VI, 30.

## C. LATER WORKS ON THE LIFE OF ANGELA MERICI

OTTAVIO GONDI, S.J.

*Vita della beata Angela Bresciana prima fondatrice della Compagnia di S. Orsola il cui corpo è venerato nella chiesa a basso di Brescia, Sabbia, 1600.*

Gondi was a Jesuit of Florence, for which reason he is also known under the name of Ottavio Fiorentino. He lived for some time in Brescia, where he became the friend of the Venerable Alessandro Luzzago, at whose suggestion he wrote the life. Alessandro Luzzago was a generous friend and protector of the Ursulines and stood close to them through Ginevra Luzzago, his grandmother, who was an intimate friend of Angela and who was one of the widows who were her first companions in the Company of St. Ursula. Gondi followed Bellintani. His book was published in 1600, and had many

editions: 1605, 1620, 1634, and in French translations, 1638, 1672, etc. It is in Gondi's book that is found the famous letter of S. Carlo Borromeo, Oct. 31, 1581, to the Company of St. Ursula.

#### BERNARDINO FAINO

*Vita della Serva de Dio di beata memoria, la Madre Angela Merici di Desenzano fondatrice della Compagnia delle Vergini di S. Orsola in Brescia. Bologna, Recaldini, 1672.*

Faino enlarged the work of Gondi and apparently strove to state the facts faithfully.

#### CARL DONEDA

*Vita della B. Angela Merici da Desenzano fondatrice della Compagnia di S. Orsola. Brescia, Rizzardi, 1768.*

Doneda was Librarian at the Queriniana. On the occasion of the Beatification of Angela he received the commission from the superioress of the Ursulines in Brescia to gather together all the materials which might further the Process. For this purpose the archives of the Company were opened to him. The Superioress persuaded Doneda, for his research work, to write a new life of Angela. He was permitted to use the oldest sources: the Letter of Landini, the Processo Nazari, the Diario del Nassino, the records of Tribesco, and various manuscripts of the Company. He went at it with the conscientiousness of a historian. Wherever there were differences of opinion or proofs for the same facts, he made critical comparisons giving the reasons for his personal conclusions, or else he left the question open. He gave the sources word for word, with the assurance that he proceeded with the greatest exactness. From an historical point of view, Doneda's work surpasses all those previous to his, and also most of those that follow. It was, without doubt, the most important of the lives of Angela and went through several editions.

#### GIROLAMO LOMBARDI

*Vita della beata Angela Merici fondatrice della Compagnia di S. Orsola. Venezia, 1778.*

An excellent work. Lombardi mentions in it the most trifling events about which he could obtain accounts. But the references to the sources are missing.

#### STEFANI ANGELO

*Compendio della Vita di S. Angela. Salò, 1800.*

#### FILIPO MARIA SALVATORI, S.J.

*Vita della S. Madre Angela Merici fondatrice della Compagnia di S. Orsola ossia della Instituto delle Orsoline. Roma, Lazzaroni, 1806, 240 pp., in 4.*

This *Life* was published in Rome at the Canonization of St. Angela.

The legendary events connected with her are brought out by such pleasing breadth of narration, that the character sketch of Angela is somewhat obscured. Salvatori is very exact in his use of old sources, but it is not easy to say whether he had the use of them or whether he was only following Doneda. In the appendix are many important documents, which we have listed elsewhere.

JACOPO GUSSAGO

*Notizie Storici — critiche intorno alla vita di Angela Merici da Desenzano, fondatrice della Compagnia delle Orsoline.* Queriniana MSS. Ducos n. 1116, autograph of the author; ready for press.

Cesare Cantù says in *Grande Illustrazione del Lombardo-Veneto*, Vol. III, Mailand, 1858, page 152: "The celebration of the Canonization of St. Angela gave occasion to Gussago to write an historical essay about his fellow-citizen. In this he makes a critical comparison between earlier biographies, and is scrupulously exact in weighing the different extracts. His work really deserves the title 'critical,' and is the most scientific of the Lives that have so far appeared." Yet the work of Gussago is not considered a rounded life-picture but an historical study.

PACIFICO DEANI

*St. Angela Merici, Orazione.* Brescia, Spinelli e Valetti, 1817.

GIUSEPPE BRUNATI

*Vita e Gesta dei Santi Bresciani.*

Brescia, Venturini, 1856. Vol. II, pp. 67-90.

A sketch from the works of Doneda and Lombardi with notes. It accentuates the legendary elements.

ELISABETTA GIRELLI

*Della Vita di Angela Merici vergine Bresciana e del suo istituto.*

Brescia, 1871, 4th edition.

The author followed, without critical regard, the works of former biographers. Many pious considerations interspersed give this little work the character of a book of edification. Countess Girelli, however, as restoratrice of the Primitive Company in our own day, had all the traditions of her native place to draw upon.

D. GERMAN AND FRENCH BIOGRAPHIES OF ANGELA MERICI appear partly as translations and extracts from the Italian, and partly as independent works.



## MICHAEL SINTZEL

*Leben der Hl. Angela Merici stisterin des Ordens der Ursulinerinnen usw. nach der italienischen Ausgabe zu Rom 1806.* Regensburg, 1843.

Sintzel translates Salvatori and abridges his work. In this way, an indistinct picture of Angela arises, wherein in no place does her character appear clearly. Sintzel's style corresponds with the representation; it is far behind the original Italian.

## W. E. HUBERT

*Die hl. Angela Merici; in Lives of Catholic Educators*, 3 vols. Mainz, 1891.

*Lebensgeschichte der hl. Angela Merici stisterin des Ordens der Ursulinerinnen nach dem französischen Bearbeitet von einer Tochter der hl. Angela.* Paderborn, 1892.

In the year 1893 this work appeared in its first edition at Innsbruck.

## P. HUGUES QUARRÉ

A free repetition in French of Gondi's Life; later one from Dijon, 1769; another in Rome, 1778, and the edition of Canon Parenty at Arras, 1842.

## V. POSTEL

*Histoire de Sainte Angèle Merici et de tout l'Ordre des Ursulines.* Paris, Poussiélgue, 1878.

This two-volume work, relates in the first half of the first volume the life of Angela. The author endeavored to bring her nearer to our own times. Yet in many ways his work bears the character of a biographical legend. Nevertheless, Postel's work was considered the best which the century produced in French.

## AT

*Histoire de Sainte Angèle Merici.* Mondouville, 1885.

The author not only chose poetical language for his narrative, but also allowed himself poetical license in the materials from both the historical and legendary point of view.

## BOUTROURS

*Sainte Angèle Merici et les origines de l'Ordre des Ursulines.* Abbéville, 1894.

## E. TO THE ABOVE MENTIONED WORKS MAY BE ADDED

1880. BERNARD O'REILLY

*History of St. Angela Merici.* New York.

1906.

*Vie de la Sainte Fondatrice Angèle Merici, 1474-1540; en douze gravures par une membre du Couvent des Ursulines d'Innsbruck avec une Texte Explicatif du Prédicateur de la Cour.* P. Celestine Wolfsgruber, O.S.B. 72 pp. Innsbruck.

An attempt to popularize the Saint among the young.

1912. M. VINCENTIA NEUSEE, O.S.U. *Die hl. Angela Merici ein Lebensbild mit 48 abbildungen.* Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Herder. A serious study done with circumspection and careful investigation; justly considered one of the best of the lives.

1919. SAC. PROF. MICHELANGELO GRANCELLO

*Di S. Angela Merici e del suo Istituto; brevi Cenni.* Verona, 76 pp. in 16.

1922. *Sainte Angèle Merici et l'Ordre des Ursulines par une Religieuse du même Ordre.* 2 vols. Paris, J. de Gigord.

Accurate, well-documented; whoever desires an extensive account of the subject has but to read these two volumes.

1923. DOTT GIUDITTA BERTOLOTTI

*Storia di S. Angela Merici virgine Bresciana, 1474-1540.* Brescia, Tip. Queriniana. 249 pp.

Matter re-arranged from a Thesis submitted in June, 1919, to the Collegio dei Professori dell 'Accademia Scientifico-Letteraria di Milano.

Dr. Bertolotti searched the archives of Brescia and Milan, consulted the noble ladies Girelli, in Brescia, who conducted the Company of St. Ursula in Brescia during the second half of the 19th and the first twenty years of the 20th century; had the cordial support of Prof. D. Paolo Guerrini, Librarian of the Queriniana; and took counsel with Mons. Luigi Gramatica, Prefect of the Ambrosiana Library. She fell happily upon a rare copy of the Processo Nazari. Her object seems to be to set forth not only a reliable biography in the best scientific sense, but to depict the unique position of Angela Merici in her own time and in the life of humanity at large. The book is a new and definitive contribution to the subject.

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## APPENDIX

### NOTE A

#### THE MERICI CHILDREN

In the absence of written proof, a definite tradition invests this incident, the vision on the Machetto Road, with probability if not with absolute certainty. What is doubtful about it is the date of its occurrence. The accounts of the Merici children are confused: two authors state that there were five of them, all dying young, no names having come down to posterity; two other authors draw attention to a nephew who survived Angela and to branches of the Merici family who later on lived in Manerbo and Solarolo, and in our day in Darso, Val Camonica. A recent biography traces these to a side branch of Mericis, cousin-Germans.

The Canonization Bull, nevertheless, states that Angela and her sister survived their mother, and in spite of this, some writers assert that it was a brother, not a sister.

Some place the vision after the death of a sister, before the mother's death, and while they were still in their old home. Others will have it after the mother's death and while Angela was living with her uncle at Salò. But the Vision of the dead sister occurred near Desenzano on the Machetto Road, as the chapel proves. So it has seemed reasonable to us, upon the evidence of the chapel and the Bull of Canonization, to infer that the incident took place after the death of one sister, before Donna Merici's decease at Desenzano, and that Angela went with the sole surviving sister to live with her uncle at Salò, where the two made their abortive attempt at the hermit's life, and the sister subsequently died, leaving Angela alone.

Salvatori speaks of a second joyful vision which was vouchsafed to Angela on the road outside Salò at the uncle's house, and after her brother's death. If Salvatori had at his command the Canonization papers, why does he give a brother and not a sister, when the Bull makes it a sister?

The facts are stated as follows:

SALVATORI:

1. Speaks of her older sister at Desenzano, p. 3.
2. Father died, p. 8.
3. Sister died, p. 9.
4. Vision of sister, p. 10.

5. Mother died, p. 11.
6. Angela went with brother to Salò, p. 12.
7. Brother died, p. 14.
8. Quotes a "learned writer" to effect that Angela had a vision of him in the road "delle Strette" on the outskirts of Salò, p. 15.

## POSTEL:

1. Angela had several brothers and a sister, p. 4.
2. Father died, p. 14.
3. Mother died, p. 18.
4. Uncle took the two nieces to Salò, p. 20.
5. Sister died, p. 24.
6. Vision of sister, p. 25.

N.B. Postel says in footnote that the question of brother or sister is disputed, but that he will not decide, p. 26.

## GIRELLI:

1. Says there is mention made of a sister and brother and nephews, Sec. 1.
2. Speaks of the two sisters, Sec. 2.
3. Father died, sister died, Sec. 5.
4. Vision of sister, Sec. 5.
5. Mother died, Sec. 6.
6. Angela and younger brother went to Salò, Sec. 6.
7. They retired to desert, Sec. 7.
8. Brother died at age of nine, Sec. 7.

*The 1922 Life*: (Paris):

1. It is thought that there were five children, three boys, two girls, Angela youngest. No names. Sons died young. There was no nephew, for the term often implied near relatives, instead of nephews. Angela with her sister in the paternal home, p. 12.
2. John Merici died, p. 19.
3. Mother died two years later, p. 20.
4. Angela and her sister went to Salò, p. 20.
5. They retired to solitude, p. 25.
6. The sister died, p. 30.
7. Vision of dead sister, p. 33.

## NAZARI-RELAZIONE NEL 1560:

1. Two children, the younger named Angela.
2. Father died.
3. Sister died shortly after.
4. Vision of sister outside Desenzano.
5. Nothing more of the childhood given.



## NOTE B

## CHRONOLOGY OF BRESCIA

- Consular Government in Brescia under the Holy Roman Empire, two centuries, 1002-1249 A.D.
- Podesta Government; Emperor John of Bohemia sells Lombard towns to nobles, one and a half centuries, 1249-1395.
- Brescia under the yoke of Milan: Emperor Wenceslaus gives to the Visconti family Milan with twenty subject towns of which Brescia is one, a quarter century, 1395-1426.
- Venice disputes with Milan for Brescia; Doge Foscari takes it from Milan, a half century, 1426-1483.
- Brescia under Venice; Pope Martin V confirms Brescia to Venice, a quarter century, 1483-1512.
- The French dispute Venetian sway over Brescia, 1512-1520.
- Brescia is reconquered by Venice until the French Revolution, 1520-1796.
- Brescia in Lombardy under Austria, 1796-1870.

A footnote in the *Codex Quiriniana* summarizes the fortunes of Brescia under the eagles of the north, France and Germany, that fastened upon her vitals: From 1509-1512 under the French; in 1512 for sixteen days, the Venetians; from February 19 to October 28 the French; from October 28 to May, 1513, under the Spanish (Germans); from May till June 8, the Venetians; from June 8, 1513 to 1516, the Spaniards; until finally, May 26, Brescia fell again, for the last time, under the Republic of Venice. Quoted by Zanelli in *La Devozione di Brescia a Venezia. Arch. Stor. Lombardo*, 1912.

## NOTE C

## THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE URSULA LEGENDS

The following facts relating to the history of St. Ursula are summarized from the *Critical and Historical Monograph* of J. H. Kessel: "St. Ursula and her Eleven Thousand Virgins or Occidental Europe in the 5th century." Brussels, Paris, 1800, done into French by Abbé Beetemé. Kessel was the Cologne Archaeologist who reviewed the Bollandists on St. Ursula in 1860.

Proofs sufficiently numerous and clear exist to justify the life of St. Ursula in the face of historical criticism. The sources of these are as follows:

## I. Monumental.

## 1. Inscriptions:

- a. Lapidary inscription still legible on the wall of the choir in

the Church of St. Ursula in Cologne. End of the 5th or beginning of the 6th century.

b. Lapidary inscription of Clematius, mentioned in the ancient *Sermo in Natali*, 5th century.

c. Inscription on the tomb of Aetherius, the fiancé of St. Ursula, about 541.

2. Liturgical: the Anthems in the Office of St. Ursula in ancient choral books, about 760 to 1050.

3. *Sermo in Natali*: an ancient panegyric antecedent to the 7th century.

4. Ancient Calendars and Martyrologies: e.g., Martyrology of the Monk Wandelbert, 851.

5. Collegial documents of the 9th and 10th centuries.

6. The Cologne Legend, popularly called *Regnante Domino*, written between the 9th and 11th centuries: in parts. *Utile non debet per inutile vitiari*.

II. Existing Relics: Bones in the *Chambre d'Ôr* of parish church of St. Ursula at Cologne; the anatomy and cranology prove the nationality to be largely Breton, Celtic type, and the sex and age to be young, robust women, and out of a hundred skulls there are only fifteen males.

III. Traditions and Legends.

IV. Documents: compiled by Kessel:

1. Parts of the most ancient Office of St. Ursula which possess any historical value, copied from 12th and 13th century Antiphonaries in libraries at Cologne and Dusseldorf.

2. Panegyric: *Sermon in Natali SS. Virginum XI millium*; five pages.

3. *Regnante Domino*: the Cologne Legend of St. Ursula; thirteen and a half pages.

4. An ancient Rhythm prior to 1132 on St. Ursula and her Companions; two pages.

5. Geoffrey of Monmouth's Legend of St. Ursula; six and a half pages.

6. *Passio XI millium virginum*, from convent of Lambach in Austria and dating from about the twelfth century; eleven and a half pages.

7. *De undecim milibus virginum*, from 13th century; three and a half pages.

8. Legend of St. Ursula and her Eleven Thousand Virgins, after the revelations of St. Elizabeth of Schoenau and B. Hermann Joseph; forty-three pages.

9. *Historia inventionis SS. Cordulae et Constantiae*, about 1390; sixteen pages.

10. The list of relics preserved in the Church of St. Ursula at Cologne.

11. Catalogue of authenticated relics of St. Ursula and her martyrs in churches other than that of St. Ursula at Cologne.

OUTLINE OF THE NARRATIVE AS GIVEN BY KESSEL IN  
HIS INVESTIGATIONS

1. Proofs that Ursula and her band originated in Britain.
2. Pressed by the Picts and Scots they emigrated to the land at the mouth of the Rhine shortly before 450 A.D.; they were not at this time eleven hundred in number nor were they all women. Proofs given.
3. The band of emigrants resided for some time in Batavia between two mouths of the Rhine.
4. They moved on to take surer refuge at Cologne, but suddenly all western Europe was seized with consternation at news of the Huns arriving from the banks of the Caspian and the foot of Caucasus. The character of the Huns was one of ferocity, grossest bestiality and hideous lust; barbaric in war, they fought with deadly arrows.
5. A general Pilgrimage to Rome was decided upon by the British band and many of the inhabitants, for the purpose of pleading with Heaven to avert the disaster of the impending Hunnish invasion.
6. This Pilgrim band were mostly women but not all British. Nothing can be proved regarding the circumstances of this voyage except that Ursula was the leading spirit.
7. The Huns, nevertheless, invaded Gaul on a great pillaging expedition about 450.
8. They swept over the cities of Gaul, Trèves, Metz, Rheims, Soissons, Paris, Troyes, Orléans, but at last, at Châlons-sur-Marne, they were checked by the Romans and Goths, and driven westward in the direction of Cologne.
9. The Huns, enraged at this check, threw themselves furiously upon the city of Cologne, and conquering, sacked it until scarcely a trace was left of its former grandeur.
10. To the plains north of the city the Huns drove all the women of the place; there, on the road whence they had entered the city, they had their chariots and army baggage, and together with these, all the women they had dragged with them, victims of their brutal passion, out of Gaul and Belgium, besides those they had fastened in chains behind their chariots. Thus the number 11,000 is scarcely exaggerated. The terrible alternative in which the prisoners found themselves, drove them to vigorous defense. Today the bones of the virgins show trace of a frightful martyrdom: many of the skulls have been cleft by sharp instruments, and traces of hair and of blood are also preserved; many of the breast bones are incontestably broken; in many the arrows are still embedded; many arms, feet, skulls, jaw bones are shattered; these present the best picture of the procedure of the Huns, and speak more eloquently than written records of the event. According to the opinions passed upon

the skulls by learned doctors, there were many men among the martyrs. The traces of violence upon the bones of Ursula in the *Chambre d'Ôr* of her church in Cologne witness her leadership in the martyrdom.

## NOTE D

## THE CULT OF ST. ANGELA

It is well known that during the years preceding the Religious Revolution of the sixteenth century such great abuses had arisen throughout Christendom in the veneration paid to those who had died in the reputation for sanctity, that Clement VIII and Paul V, watchful over the interests of religion, legislated in several different decrees towards the extirpation of such abuses, until finally Urban VIII, by decree of 1675, promulgated the important legislation which today governs the Church in the cultus of her saints. That is to say, he decreed that, throughout the Catholic world, no sort of veneration should be paid to the servants of God until after the Holy See maturely examines their merits and sets their names in the catalogue of saints or at least in that of the Blessed. Urban VIII ordained that it was no longer lawful upon any pretext to set them upon the altar or to crown them or to give them any other sign or prerogative of sanctity; that no lights might be burned before their image or at the tomb, no votive offerings could be given, nor might their life be printed, nor any eulogium, without the revision and approbation of the Ordinary, with the express protest of the author to the effect that he submits every statement regarding virtues and miracles narrated to the judgment of the Holy See. As the death of Angela occurred nearly a century before this law, public veneration of her sanctity was in full sway, and according to authentic documents many votive tablets already decorated her tomb by the time Urban VIII's decree was published to the world.

Furthermore, Salvatori calls attention to the fact that the very same Urban VIII, who so rigorously decreed that non-canonized saints might not receive public veneration, as the technical term is, to distinguish the kind of worship given the saints by the Church from the *Latria* or the worship given to God, and the *Hyperdulia*, the degree of worship accorded the Mother of God, which is, of course, in no sense the worship given to God, — this same Pope Urban approved the Rule of the Ursulines of Poligny in which was prescribed a fast on the Vigil of Blessed Madre Angela, whence the title was by him implicitly approved. The very year after the promulgation of the great decree, a picture was made of Angela with the title *Beata*, and at its dedication, Urban VII's Nuncio Apostolic in Cologne permitted the picture to be publicly exhibited.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Salvatori, 136.



Many Indults of the Holy See concurred in legitimatizing her cult, both before and after the decree of Urban VIII, in 1675; Clement IX, Oct. 1666, confirmed a Rule in Germany in which the cult of Angela was prescribed; in 1688, Innocent XI acted similarly, and finally, Benedict XIV, in 1753, ordered the same Rule revised and printed in Rome for the use of the Ursulines.

As was befitting, Angela's native town, Desenzano, was the first in the order of time to establish the cult, and this almost immediately after her death, for they elected her in full council as the town's Advocate and Protectress, and in 1587, in the principal church, her effigy was set up with those of the patron Saints. Reliable documents indicate that the chapel erected in her honor on the Merici estate dated from the earliest times, and that Mass was wont to be celebrated there with much solemnity. Today, the statue of Angela in pilgrim garb occupies the place of honor in the Piazza of Desenzano, and commands a fine view of the blue waters of Lake Garda over which the girl, Angela, used to ply her oar.

Following the lead of her natal town, many other places erected public and private altars in her honor, and in course of time the devotion spread to France, Germany, all remaining Europe, Asia, America, from Canada to Brazil; a solemn Feast Day was established by the Holy See for her, January 27, later transferred to May 31, with an Octave, and in the subsequent development of her Rule fasts and Communions were appointed for her Vigil, while on the Feast Day, processions bearing her statue were allowed; pilgrimages began early to be made to her tomb, and over all the world statues entitled Beata were popular. The French Ursulines had an Office proper to the Saint.<sup>2</sup>

In 1560 the Brescian municipality with her formal Canonization in view, set about gathering testimonials of miracles attributed to her intercession. Four depositions were legally drawn up by citizens of Brescia who had been eye-witnesses of her life. Their statements have become familiar in our pages. Four years subsequently the municipality sent a formal petition to Saint Charles Borromeo of Milan that he would do what he could to further the cause of Angela's formal Beatification. Attempts were made to introduce her formal Cause in 1682, 1692, 1744, and finally, in 1768, she was pronounced Blessed according to the procedure of Canon Law. In 1774 her body was discovered to be still incorrupt; in 1777 the Process had reached the point when her Heroic Virtue was established; and at last, in 1807, amid general rejoicing of her daughters, now numerous and widespread, the solemn Canonization took place in Rome. Slow work it was to Canonize one already canonized by popular acclaim.

Her statue, in the dress of the French Ursulines, was erected during the pontificate of Pius IX in the upper left hand niche of the *Confession* of

<sup>2</sup> Salvatori, 133.

St. Peter at Rome, where the founders of the great Religious Orders are conspicuous in effigy. There she is recognized, not indeed as the originator of a pious sodality, nor of a mere confraternity, but as Foundress of an institute that has developed with time and attained to the dignity of a great Monastic Order.

## NOTE E

## PAINTINGS OF ANGELA MERICI

We possess a description of the outward appearance of St. Angela from the pen of a person of her own time, one who knew her personally, Pandolfo Nassini, a city official of Brescia and a collector of documents, and his remarks about her appearance have already occupied our attention.

Bellintani in his turn describes her, but as Gussago observes, he draws from a portrait that was made after her death. Bellintani saw the picture after thirty or forty years while it still retained its original freshness of form and color.

Doneda says that in the year 1758, during the Beatification Process, two contemporary artists declared that the picture which formed Bellintani's idea, and which was the one painted on the entablature of her tomb, was probably a painting made from her dead features, but the two disagreed concerning the author. One thought it was Moretto, the other, Romanino.

In his biography and in a letter to the noble lady Cecilia Lagreda in Venice, Faino mentions Moretto's painting of Angela but it is not at present possible to determine whether or not Moretto's picture exists, or no. The Church of St. Afra in Bescia has a picture of the remains of the saint considered to be the work of Moretto, but it is to be feared that it is only a copy. Nearly every ancient Ursuline convent possesses such a copy, but these are very different. The technique betrays these copies to be quite mechanical, largely copies of copies. The best is probably that of the Ursulines of Innsbruck.

The noted artist, Corrado Ricci, was interested in an important artistic discovery which he published September 16, 1907, in the *Illustrazione Bresciana*, and which M. Vincenti reproduced in her *Die Heilige A. Merici*. Ricci's letter is as follows:

## VERY HONORED LADY DIRECTOR:

In the Collection of Lochi, which, together with the collections of Carraro and Morelli, constitute a part of the lovely gallery of Bergamo, there is a small tablet picture, 38 × 30 inches.

It represents the head of a departed old lady, wrapped in linen, with

the veil of a nun. This head, delicately drawn, well portraying the peace of death, was for a long time accredited to Correggio, then later to Gerolamo Mazzola Bedoli-Frizzoni of Parma. Cavenaghi and I, who often exchange opinions, thought we saw in it the touch of a later age, the work of a sixteenth century hand with a richer palette than Correggio or Bedoli, who usually worked with more delicate and lighter color.

Along with the question of the artist, arises the question of the identity of the subject: who may the peaceful old nun be, thus religiously portrayed? I myself contend that it is St. Angela Merici, on account of the strong resemblance to the features of the picture of her in the sacristy of St. Afra's. Here is the same nose, slightly rounded at the end, raised nostrils, the same broad and slightly-arched mouth, receding over toothless jaws, and the long marked chin. The head-covering is white as in the picture at St. Afra's, as well as in the picture representing her seated with the first Ursulines. Since her remains are still incorrupt we understand why the artist portrays her in death. We must also take into consideration the fact that the picture was found in a town near Brescia where Angela died in 1540.

I leave it to you and your co-workers on your paper to study the matter further, and to correct any mistakes of

Yours respectfully,

CORRADO RICCI

The picture on the entablature, the second painting which is in St. Afra's, and a third, then, which is also in St. Afra's, and which some hold to be the very first authentic picture, the one which served as cover to Angela's casket, seem to be the best existing approaches to that early authenticity which is so prized. But this last, this third, although in it the Saint is represented as dead, with face almost in profile, bears but little resemblance to the two others; the eyes are farther apart, the nose is decidedly longer, the upper lip fuller, the mouth less broad. It is curious that the picture in the sacristy and the picture in the church, both representing the same person, both considered authentic, are so different; it is thought by M. Vincentia that the picture on the death-bed is probably the truest likeness; the other two she considers to have been drawn from inexact memory, or else from a portrait other than the one in St. Afra's. M. Vincentia continues:

"When I questioned one of our co-workers, Pietro da Ponte, as to his opinion in the matter, he said that he recollected the Exhibition of Sacred Art in Brescia in 1904, where he had seen a little picture dating from the 18th century, which was labelled — A Copy of the Portrait of Angela Merici, which, according to the opinion of Brunatis, Moretto himself painted.

"It would be interesting to compare the so-called Moretto copy with the painting at Bergamo. Perhaps we would discover the latter to be, if not a genuine Moretto, still a work of one of his pupils, G. B. Moroni, a celebrated portrait painter. The little picture in the sacristy of St. Afra's has nearly the same dimensions as the picture in Bergamo, the height only a centimeter more than the width, and the head, although upright, still has the eyes closed.

"It must be remembered that this and the cover picture were accredited to Moretto by Doneda and Faino, the early biographers. The former picture especially betrays Moretto's art in the drawing of the shadows, in the color of the linen, above all in the transparent white with gray-blue reflections.

"It is thus highly probable that in the vicinity of Brescia are several pictures of Angela Merici which were made through the Mericis or the sisters of the Company of St. Ursula. Ricci's opinion is probably correct that the painting in the Lochi Collection at Bergamo is a real St. Angela, painted after death, 1540, and that it cannot be ascribed to either Correggio or Mazzola."

And thus ends the information which up to date has been gleaned regarding authentic portraiture of the Saint.

But besides the portraits there exist many interesting idealized representations of the subject in art, which concern themselves not with portraiture but with her personality as a holy Foundress. For instance, many artists have portrayed the Vision of the Ladder.

One of the pictures counted among the oldest represents Angela teaching her ladies. Although it is interesting, it is of little artistic value. It is dated 1540.

There are pictures from the life of Angela in the Church of St. Ursula in Chiari, Province of Brescia, lifelike compositions of the late Renaissance.

The parish church at Desenzano was decorated by the artist P. Rizzi Calcinardi, in 1840, with six subjects taken from her life:

The first is her childhood: the Merici family are sitting under a great tree, where Angela on her father's knee is praying with folded hands, the mother and older sister listening.

The second shows the Vision of Brudazzo.

The third shows the storm at sea which Angela quieted by her prayers. The Saint standing in the fore part of the ship raises her hand in blessing over the waves.

The fourth depicts the meeting between Francesco Sforza and Angela.

The fifth leads us to the Papal apartment: Angela has just entered and has fallen on her knees at the feet of Clement VII.

In the sixth, the Saint is dying on her mat on the floor, with a dazzling light falling upon her from above.



The modern German painters have treated the subject in a fresh and original manner. Lauenstein, whose work became known through the association for spreading religious art in Düsseldorf, painted Angela, seated in the midst of a group of young girls at their needlework; their dress, the manner of their work, all is modern.

Joseph Kastner in his admirable art depicts Angela teaching two children.

Führich builds his composition on the text "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." The central figure is Christ, seated, with loving arms outstretched to the children whom Angela has led to Him. Among these children the artist has painted his daughter Paula, who later took the habit of the Ursulines, as Sister Felicitas, and now lies buried in the cemetery of the Ursulines of Brown County, while to Angela he gave the features of his children's governess, who likewise later entered the Order and died in the office of Superioress at Vienna.

Von Felsburg painted an interesting conception of the subject in a canvas which is today over the left side-altar of the Ursuline church in Innsbruck. A group of children is represented, led by an Ursuline nun, to whom Angela Merici is standing facing them and with raised hand drawing their attention to a Della Robbia relief of the Virgin Mother. To the left of this group, in fine composition, is a second group, consisting of a charming Florentine lady in rich costume, to whom an Ursuline nun is showing a picture of Angela's Vision of Brudazzo in which she was called to found her Order. The nun watches the effect of the picture upon the young woman. The treatment bears something of Ghirlandajo.

The artist, Völkel produced a good piece of genre in 1910, as an altar piece for a convent chapel in Hungary. The Saint is instructing little children; the window corner of an old German room makes it a scene of genuine homelikeness. This picture has become very popular in reproduction.

For further information regarding Angela as subject for the artists the pages of M. Vincentia's book afford an excellent source.

#### NOTE F

##### A VISIT TO DESENZANO AND BRESCIA

An account of a VISIT TO CONTESSA GIRELLI, who revived the *Primitive Rule* of St. Angela in the 19th century. From a letter by an Alumna of Ursuline Convent, Brown County, Ohio.

I wish I could tell you how much pleasure and profit I derived from looking for material for you. My only hope is that what little I have collected may be of value.

We reached Desenzano the nineteenth of April, a glorious morning; and I wish I could describe what I saw when the train came out from between two lines of hills: the Lago di Garda at the foot of the Brescian Alps covered with snow, and the water, dazzling sapphire, merging into turquoise, and winding, deep blue, between the foot-hills.

A Padre, sauntering along the little portici by the lake, upon request, led us to a house of semi-cloistered Ursulines. Here we found a dear little sister who spoke French. She wore a strange habit, black, with a three cornered shawl on her shoulders and a crucifix on her breast, a white kerchief about her neck and a white cap with fluted ruffle. She told me where to find the Merici house and the church.

Next, we drove to the house where St. Angela was born. It stands about two miles outside Desenzano, I think, a quaint, forlorn, old farmhouse, in front of which is a small shrine. When we entered we found the family in the large room downstairs, a room with earthen floor, a sort of kitchen-dining room. The family sat around the centre table, all, old and young, eating some kind of broth. To one side was a large open fireplace, with a crane and kettle boiling away for dear life. The whole family sprang up at our coming and when we asked, seemed overjoyed to show us the house. Inside, the house was as clean as could be desired. The most interesting room we saw was that in which St. Angela was born. We went up a flight of old steps,—the original, I imagine,—that felt as if they would come down every time you set your foot upon them, and entering directly upon the bedroom now used by the entire family, I should judge, for there were three large beds and two small ones in the room. Floor, walls, and ceiling were of rough wood, and the only ornaments were a few holy pictures and a remarkable collection of photos, one of them of a child in the Ursuline habit. The house was interesting and old, the people sweet and simple, fitting inheritors of the place. Not far away the ground work has been begun and the first stone laid for a little chapel in St. Angela's honor.

Today, April 20, we came to Brescia, a charming and busy little town situated at the foot of the Brescian Alps. First, we went to the Church of St. Afra where we saw the body of St. Angela, which, unlike that of Santa Clara, is perfectly white, the latter being black. The skin is stretched in such a way as to make the body look like a skeleton, though there seemed nothing horrible about it; the features are sweet and marvellously preserved. I have seen living women look far more corpse-like. St. Angela simply looks as if she were old and tired and had fallen asleep.

Next we went to visit Madame Girelli who, far from being dead, is a very active and very lovely woman. (Madame Girelli died in 1919.) The maid who took our cards came back with word that the Countess was not receiving today. Whereupon I explained that I had come upon an errand from an Ursuline sister in America and greatly desired information

about the work done by the Angelines. "Madame Girelli was not well, would I write in French what I wanted?" I wrote that I wished a list of her writings, and some information, when down came a copy of the *Vita* written by Madame Girelli. Then I wrote a pleading note, begging to be admitted, and said that I had stopped in Brescia especially to see her. This time I was asked to come up. We went into a bare little room in which a crucifix was about the only adornment, and in a moment Madame Girelli entered.

Without exception, she is the most wonderful woman with whom I have come in contact; she has marvellous personal magnetism, but the most striking thing about her is her eyes, — "holy eyes," is the only way I can express them; — they look as if they were accustomed to seeing visions. She is the kind of person you want to kneel before and ask a blessing, only that she is so simple that such an action would embarrass her. She was most gracious, asking pardon for delay, which, of course, made me feel very rude in my insistence. Madame Girelli is not very tall, slightly stout; she wears black with a black net over her brown hair. She is over sixty, charming in manner and very dignified, speaking rapidly and with a barely perceptible occasional lisp.

She gave me the picture (which, it seems, is very rare) of the death-mask of St. Angela, which is in the little room where she died. She gave me also a copy of the *Primitive Rule* of St. Angela in Italian, and an *Explication* (by Madame Girelli) of the same. I asked her to write her name in her *Life of the Saint*, for I thought you might care for it and she did it most graciously. We left Countess Girelli, feeling as if we had spoken with a saint, — a dear, human saint, anxious to help you, and who laughed to distraction at your mistakes in Italian. I took the liberty of promising Madame Girelli, on your part, a copy of your book on St. Angela when it is finished.

Pardon the extreme length of this letter; there was so much to say, And I cannot tell you how I enjoyed doing it.

ELEANOR MACDONALD BANKS, E. DE M.





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